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New York

President:	Mr. Gurirab	(Namibia)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Fonseca
	Canada	Mr. Fowler
	China	Mr. Shen Guofang
	France	Mr. Doutriaux
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Mohammad Kamal
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Eldon
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

99-85690 (E)

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The meeting was resumed at 3.35 p.m.

Mr. van Walsum (Netherlands): Mr. President, I should like to join my colleagues who spoke this morning in expressing my satisfaction at seeing you chair this important meeting. In the second half of this year the United Nations and its principal organs are favoured with a generous portion of Namibian chairmanships. We also wish to commend your country for having taken the initiative to devote a public meeting of the Council to the issue of children and armed conflict.

I am grateful to Special Representative Otunnu for his statement on the subject. He has shown once again that with him the advocacy of the cause of children and armed conflict is in able hands.

The protection of children appears to be one of those issues which unite all nations. This is borne out, for instance, by the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is also accepted throughout the world that children require particular protection in situations of armed conflict. Today it is the Security Council that will take a step to bring us closer to this goal.

It is important to realize that this is an item which will not disappear from the agenda after today's work. In the preparation of this meeting one could sense the determination of all members of the Council to see to it that the issue of children in armed conflict will be addressed every time the Council takes action to maintain or restore peace and security.

In various instances the Council has done so in the recent past. This debate therefore comes at the right time: we can build on concrete experience and plan further action. That is the essence of the draft resolution before us, and it has the full support of my delegation.

As we pointed out on an earlier occasion, it is of particular importance that personnel involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities be familiarized with subjects such as the protection, rights and welfare of children. They should be specifically trained to deal with child soldiers.

By definition child soldiers are under age by international or national standards and are therefore unfit for participation in armed conflict. Tragically, these child soldiers, often in their early teens, are not only the victims of the armed conflict in which they are caught up, but, as recent experience has shown, they can be the perpetrators of atrocities as well. An integrated approach should lead to their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in society.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments contain clear prohibitions with regard to the use of child soldiers. These norms have to be respected. In the field of standards-setting some further progress is being made. The Netherlands has begun the process leading to the ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182, which prohibits forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. Obviously, States are free to go beyond the minimum standards; in that case the norms that provide the highest degree of protection to children will prevail.

This Council has had before it many reports on individual situations where the rights of children were violated on a massive scale. In such cases it is the responsibility of all States and the international community to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

From the outset the Netherlands has been supportive, including financially, of the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Under-Secretary-General Otunnu. By drawing attention to the impact of armed conflict on children, both in general and in concrete cases — such as in the countries he visited — he is fulfilling his important mandate, which was modelled on the recommendations contained in the watershed report by Ms. Graça Machel.

My delegation also wishes to pay tribute to the important work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of other agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — as well as the contribution of the International Committee of the Red Cross and numerous other organizations — in alleviating the impact of armed conflicts on children. UNICEF has been instrumental in effectuating active child protection for many years. It also applies its child-rights perspective to the situation of children in conflict situations. I am sure the recently launched Peace and Security Agenda for Children will further guide UNICEF in its worldwide activities aimed at the protection of children. That the Netherlands is one of the major donors to UNICEF's programme, we owe largely to the remarkable support and trust the organization has generated among individual Dutch contributors.

The Netherlands is prepared to increase its support for projects benefiting children affected by armed conflicts. At present, we lend support to several projects aimed at the rehabilitation of child soldiers in Africa.

In all this, we let ourselves be guided by a complex of considerations. First, it goes without saying that the fate of individual children is the subject of our concern. But beyond that, we are dealing with the fate of nations. Children unsettled and traumatized by armed conflict risk growing up to be a liability for their society, whereas children saved from this scourge can help build a healthy society and prevent the next conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of the Netherlands for his kinds words addressed to my country and myself.

Mr. Fowler (Canada): It is indeed a pleasure to see you, Sir, presiding over the work of the Security Council today. You clearly have many friends around this table and within these walls. Twenty-two years ago, as a junior member of the Canadian Security Council delegation, I had the distinct pleasure of working with you and President Nujoma, as the Gang of Five sought to negotiate Namibia's freedom — a process that culminated in resolution 435 (1978), passed in September 1978, which, far too many years later, led to the independence of your country. It is a delight to now serve on the Security Council with a vigorous and effective Namibian delegation and an honour to meet today under your presidency.

(spoke in French)

Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, for your initiative in calling this open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for providing the context for our debate, in particular by presenting his assessment of the harsh realities faced by children affected by war. I also wish to thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for circulating to Council members her excellent overview of the important work that UNICEF is doing in the field. My delegation considers it indeed unfortunate that Ms. Bellamy could not be present to participate in this important debate, where UNICEF's unique expertise would have been most valuable.

The protection of civilians during armed conflicts is a central aspect of human security. Children, as the most vulnerable civilian group, deserve the Council's special consideration. In the open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, held last February at Canada's initiative, the Council devoted particular attention to child victims of war, and we believe that this issue must remain a priority on our agenda.

Children are the future of the global community and of human security. Ensuring respect for their rights, their protection and their welfare is a collective obligation, and any failure on our part in these areas necessarily undermines our efforts to promote the rule of law. As States we must do our utmost to comply fully with our obligations under the relevant international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva conventions and their protocols. Children are increasingly the innocent victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We must therefore put an end to the culture of impunity through unflagging support for the international tribunals and the timely establishment of the International Criminal Court. In addition, if we are to achieve effective reconciliation and ensure the full participation of children in their societies, we must work to ensure that war-affected children are rehabilitated and reintegrated into their communities. By failing to address the effects of armed conflict on children, we risk jeopardizing the prospects for sustainable peace.

The Lomé Peace Agreement for Sierra Leone focuses appropriately on war-affected children. Its signing is an important turning point for the international community. The conflict in that country has been dubbed the "children's war" because of how many of the victims and perpetrators of violence have been children. This is why the successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers will be a decisive element in rebuilding a climate of security and stability.

National efforts to address accountability and reconciliation after the traumatic events which occurred in Sierra Leone will also be crucial. Canada welcomes the Security Council's expansion of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) and supports efforts for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, which must specifically recognize the special needs of children.

(spoke in English)

Canada strongly supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu. As we are all too aware, the legal norms and standards which exist to

protect the rights of children are most often honoured in the breach. Mr. Otunnu has raised the profile of children's rights in conflict-affected areas with particular leaders on all sides of a withering array of devastating conflicts, with non-governmental organizations, and with domestic constituencies throughout the world. More substantively, his numerous missions to conflict-affected countries, including Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone and Colombia, have resulted in commitments to stop recruiting and deploying children under the age of 18.

We also strongly support the efforts of other key bodies within the United Nations system as they seek to protect children caught up in conflicts throughout the world. Agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, all drawing on years of experience with children, have critical roles to play on the ground in implementing effective programmes to address the needs of war-affected children. This makes it the more important that those involved in addressing this problem within the United Nations system coordinate and collaborate carefully so that no effort is wasted. While we recognize that some progress has been made in this area, more is clearly required.

My delegation is deeply troubled by the growing number of child soldiers, now numbering more than 300,000 — not only the children who use and carry weapons, but also the many young girls and boys who serve fighting factions as water carriers, messengers or sex slaves. The practice of employing children as weapons of war must be stopped. We must also be creative in finding solutions which can integrate children who have been left orphaned or abandoned by families, clans and communities. Children should be offered real alternatives to joining armies or rebel groups, or indeed to living alone on the streets.

To this end, Canada has a three-track approach. First, we support the development of a strong optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, aimed at raising the age of recruitment in the armed forces and the age at which people may legally participate in hostilities. Canada is taking measures to be in a position to support the strongest possible standard by the time the working group next meets, in January 2000.

Secondly, civil society partnerships are central to the way Canada approaches human security. Complex problems, such as that of war-affected children, call for multifaceted responses. Governments alone cannot prevent abuses against children trapped in conflicts; nor can they alone heal the impact of war-related trauma. Close cooperation among international organizations, regional bodies and civil society, such as the international non-governmental organization Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, is crucial to devising coordinated responses and imaginative solutions.

Thirdly, we recognize the importance of regional initiatives. Canada congratulates the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States on their regional efforts to combat the use of child soldiers and to assist the plight of war-affected children more generally. The African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers, held in Maputo last April 1999, and the Latin American regional conference, held in July, have built momentum at the regional and subregional levels. These conferences have succeeded in bringing Governments together with civil society to examine the problem in an effective partnership. They tell us that solutions too will require partnerships and, to be sustainable, must be built on local and regional initiatives which recognize traditional values.

Two weeks ago the Secretary-General called for "days of tranquillity" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enable the country's more than 10 million children to be immunized against polio, measles and diphtheria. Canada believes that the Council should support such humanitarian ceasefires as an important element in long-term peace-building. My delegation shared the Secretary-General's dismay, however, when the campaign was interrupted and valuable supplies wasted in several parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo a few days later. As a result, many children could not be vaccinated. The situation of the Congolese children speaks to the problem we debate today: children did not cause the conflict in the Congo, yet they are so deeply, so dramatically and so desperately affected by such struggles in the most basic of ways.

In many war-torn societies, landmines constitute one of the most significant threats to children. It is estimated that approximately 25 per cent of the world's landmine victims are children who come into direct contact with mines as they play, go to school, tend livestock or gather food and water. Moreover, given their relative size, child victims of landmines are more likely to suffer more seriously, or to die, as a result of their injuries. In addition, children are particularly vulnerable to the threat

of landmines as a result of their natural curiosity about strange objects as well as their relative inability to recognize and respect warning signs of mined areas. While it is difficult to fathom, some militaries have deliberately targeted children with landmines by developing brightly coloured mines that look like toys.

In her study on the impact of armed conflict on children, Graça Machel called on the international community to denounce this attack on children for what it is: intolerable and unacceptable, as children have no part in warfare. In the Security Council, we should accelerate our efforts to address the problems of war-affected children and, more generally, to promote the protection of all civilians. Other forums — the General Assembly, regional organizations and other key meetings such as the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent — will also play vitally important roles.

My delegation looks forward to the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and to discussing the concrete recommendations contained therein. We also look forward to participating in the preparation of the report on children and armed conflict envisaged in the draft resolution before the Council today.

The President: I thank the representative of Canada for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me personally.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia.

On the eve of the new millennium, we can look back on this century, which witnessed two world wars, the invention and use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and a record number of atrocities, especially the killing of civilians in armed hostilities. The most recent means of warfare has been the heinous targeting of civilians, particularly women and children. And even more atrocious is the ever more prevalent practice of including children in regional conflicts not as mere victims but as perpetrators.

We celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the relevant Geneva Conventions on 12 August 1999. But, obviously, it was not a joyous occasion — the world has witnessed just too much suffering. The important thing, however, is that this situation cannot be ignored any longer.

The Geneva Conventions embody the norms and standards set forth for all warfare, starting first of all with legal protection for prisoners of war, as set out in 1929 and then again in 1977. Thus, the international community, having learned the lessons of inter-State, colonial and civil wars, elaborated and signed the two Additional Protocols to the Conventions, which are applicable to those conflicts and provide greater protection for civilians during hostilities.

Sadly, the numerous conflicts that have been waged around the world in the 1990s have been marked by perpetual violations of human rights and international humanitarian law rather than by their observance. New ways have to be found and efforts have to be intensified to keep the worst horrors at bay and to ensure that victims of such conflicts can preserve their dignity and enjoy protection. There is also a need for internationally accepted norms and standards concerning the human rights instruments that should be complied with by everyone involved in today's conflicts.

One such effort is today's meeting of the Security Council devoted to children and armed conflict. Namibia felt compelled to have this debate under its presidency this month as a demonstration of my country's commitment to helping address this serious situation. Personally, it also provides a fitting prelude to my assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, during which I trust that this matter and others relating to children will receive the prominence they deserve. I have made a personal pledge that I will endeavour to ensure that this is the case.

Our continent, Africa, has been ravaged by armed conflicts and many millions of children are affected and dying as a result. We therefore felt duty-bound yet again to call the attention of the Security Council and the international community at large to this critical situation. The Security Council has a very important role to play in this respect, as it is mandated by the Charter to maintain international peace and security.

I expect that an appropriate resolution will be adopted, building on last year's presidential statement aimed at strengthening the protection of children. I would like to thank all the members of the Council for their cooperation and valuable contributions and support in this endeavour.

My appreciation is also extended to my brother and dear friend, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, for having

accepted our invitation to address the Council on this issue and for his most outstanding and informative contribution. Yes, we remember Mrs. Graça Machel for her remarkable dedication and pioneering work on behalf of the world's children. Mr. Otunnu can count on the continued support of Namibia to carry out his very important responsibility to keep high on the international peace agenda the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflicts.

Much of what has been said here today by many speakers Namibia agrees with fully, so I will not belabour these points. However, there is added value to highlighting a few salient points.

Namibia, having itself experienced a long and bitter struggle for liberation, holds peace as being vital and sacrosanct. We maintain that children have no role as perpetrators in armed conflicts at any time. Therefore, Namibia subscribes to the call that children be treated as zones of peace. They are our future and we need to ensure that they develop their fullest potential. It is therefore our collective obligation to unreservedly condemn the use of child soldiers and all other atrocities perpetrated against children by adults in war zones.

To this end, the international community must take effective measures to turn the situation around by putting an end to armed conflicts and their root causes, thereby eliminating the suffering of children, including their suffering as sexual slaves. Chief among these causes are the unacceptable levels of poverty, hunger and socio-economic backwardness in developing countries. In addition to these development woes, we now have ethnic and religious wars, as well as organized crime, with most devastating consequences. The international community as a whole, Governments, industry, civil society and the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, have a moral obligation urgently and resolutely to seek effective ways of removing these causes of armed conflict.

The impact of armed conflicts on children is exacerbated by international arms dealers who fuel internecine conflicts through the flow of arms and other military hardware, especially small arms, which are light enough for children to handle in theatres of armed conflict. We must take concerted action to identify the sources of small arms and light weapons, on the side both of producers and users, and to stop their illicit production and trafficking, as well as their availability to children.

Cooperation between the United Nations and Member States, through regional mechanisms in conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as during the post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction phase, must be enhanced, encouraged and fully supported.

Earlier commitments made by Member States to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international agencies dealing with children affected by war, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are of particular importance in terms of the mobilization of resources to implement the existing programmes.

The Security Council must take appropriate action within its scope of responsibility to reinforce all efforts aimed at getting the warring parties to observe the accepted rules concerning the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the recent International Labour Organization Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour have given us additional ammunition to wage this struggle.

As members of the international community, we must continue to insist on a measure of rationality and equity in our response to victims of armed conflicts, in particular children. We, as one human family, are demeaned and diminished when the response to the humanitarian needs of victims does not measure up to the gravity of the situation as regards the plight of children.

In Africa, the impact of armed conflict on children has been particularly harmful, unceasing and widespread. No region of the continent has been spared the scourge of armed conflict. I wish to appeal to States Members of the United Nations to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to the lead agencies to facilitate the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers into society.

The Namibian delegation has consistently supported the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1996. We commend the Special Representative not only for the ground-breaking work he has done so far but also for the resolute manner in which he is executing his mandate. I

would like to commend the Secretary-General for giving him the support and encouragement he needs.

We believe that the protection of children affected by armed conflict requires coordination among all the relevant agencies of the United Nations and its allied collaborators, and we call upon all the principal actors on behalf of children to continue to see this as a joint endeavour.

Namibia agrees as well that it is necessary for the international community to increase the minimum age for recruitment and participation in armed conflicts to 18 years. Namibia adheres to the minimum age of 18 years for recruitment into the military. In this regard, it is our hope that the current deadlock of the Working Group on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be resolved in accordance with our common commitment made in 1990 — the "first call for children".

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Heads of State or Government, at their last summit of this millennium, held in Algiers, reaffirmed their determination to "work relentlessly towards the promotion of the rights and welfare of the child" and their "commitment to combat all forms of child exploitation, and in particular put an end to the phenomenon of child soldiers". Namibia is committed to this undertaking. In Africa this year we had two very important meetings, both held in Maputo, Mozambique, on the issue of children and armed conflict and anti-personnel landmines.

We call upon all United Nations agencies and others, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to increase their ongoing efforts to provide all necessary assistance in this regard. UNICEF, as the principal agency mandated with the protection of children, should be provided with additional resources if it is to give full attention to the protection of children everywhere. Strong and persistent effort by all principal actors is required if we are to achieve a world where children will be allowed to be children only. The challenges we are faced with are enormous and require each and everyone to work in a holistic, collaborative and dedicated manner to ensure that the standards which we have accepted are fully enjoyed by their ultimate beneficiaries, the children, who are the leaders of tomorrow.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Algeria. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): There is very good reason why questions that are of great concern to Africa in recent weeks have been the subject of such careful — and, we hope, fruitful — consideration by the Council.

The emphasis placed today by the Security Council on the tragic situation of children in armed conflict stems not only from the Council's long-standing interest in this question but also from your personal commitment, Mr. President, to just causes in general and to African causes in particular. It stems also from the fact that, out of solidarity with all those who are suffering, your country — our sister country, Namibia — has always sought to espouse those causes, as the day-to-day work done by Ambassador Martin Andjaba in the United Nations has made abundantly clear.

On behalf of the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whom I represent here, and on behalf of the Group of African States — which I have the honour of chairing during this month of August — I wish to convey to you, Sir, my heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council and to express our confidence in you and in your wise and successful conduct of the work of the Council.

I should like also to take this opportunity to pay sincere tribute to Ambassador Hasmy of Malaysia for his presidency of the Council, which he assumed with discretion and skill.

In one of the United Nations Children's Fund's publicity campaigns, a child, asked what he wants to be when he grows up, answers, "I want to be alive". That answer sums up in a nutshell the magnitude of the tragedy suffered by the tens of millions of children affected in some way by natural or man-made disasters.

I am certain that all present today recall the terrifying figures quoted a year ago in this Chamber by Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who today has returned to express his horror at the continuing tragedy of children in Africa and elsewhere and to remind us of our obligations and our past commitments.

More than 2 million children have been killed, millions of others wounded or maimed for life, 10 million seriously traumatized and 12 million abandoned to their fate and left homeless — all of this in the past decade alone. The nightmare goes on, because conflicts have in recent years increased in number and in intensity, continuing to cut short the lives of thousands of children, primarily among those 300,000 who serve as child soldiers in several areas of conflict; also among civilian populations, which today are being particularly targeted and where women and children are the primary victims of violence; and finally in situations where anti-personnel and other types of landmines killing and maim, year in and year out, more than 800 children.

It is true that war is not a recent phenomenon. It is as old as the human race. It has accompanied its evolution throughout the ages and served its interests. Women and children have always suffered from the savagery of men, have been used as war booty and have supplied the slave markets. But never have children been so targeted, massacred, abused, raped, mutilated and robbed of their innocence and childhood dreams as they are at the dawn of the third millennium.

These children — victims of war, physically and mentally disabled, orphans raised in street violence and in poverty — what kind of future can they dream of, if they can dream at all? Tens of thousands of them remember only atrocities and battle from their childhood, whether as actors or as victims. They are caught in a spiral of violence and despair whose causes they do not know and whose consequences they cannot control.

How have we arrived at this senseless dehumanization, at this wanton desecration of life, these outrages committed against our children? Explanations abound, and they indicate to us the path to follow and the solutions to be implemented to put an end once and for all to the unbearable pictures that television networks, as if to make us feel guilty, show us in all their stark brutality and inhumanity.

First, many of the conflicts in the world are clearly internal in nature with strong ethnic or religious overtones. It is not regular armies that are waging war; those armies are supposed to enforce respect for the limits by which the law of war and international humanitarian law have tried to manage the conduct of war, trying to humanize somehow the deadly madness of mankind.

In fact, we are talking here about armed groups that increasingly conscript adolescents forcibly into their ranks and that indulge today in violence that is particularly unrestrained because they are not bound by any code of honour. This violence is directed not against military targets, but against defenceless civilians, whom they terrorize in order to subjugate and use them or whom they exterminate because of the evil represented by their ethnic or religious identity.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that 90 per cent of the victims of conflicts going on in the world are civilians, a large proportion of which are women and children. The reason for this is that these conflicts are often fuelled, supplied and perpetuated — and they can go on for decades — by illicit small arms trafficking, which, despite all the declarations, appeals and warnings, continues to prosper, placing in the hands of children the tools of their own destruction, thus undoing all of our efforts to curb conflicts.

Similarly, and despite the adoption almost three years ago of a Convention that was described as a historic turning point in our struggle to ban anti-personnel landmines, the use of these arms has hardly diminished. Even if it had, we would hardly have noticed it, so numerous are the mines that were planted in the past, including during the colonial period and up to the Second World War. Every day, in Angola, Rwanda, Cambodia and elsewhere, they kill and maim.

Last year, as Mr. Otunnu said in his first statement to the Council, the fate of children is tied to a genuine crisis of values at the international and the local level. At the international level, instruments establishing the limits of war are often violated. Recent and not so recent events offer many examples of the bombing of civilian targets, even civilian populations, which have been presented as a necessity or at best as a regrettable mistake. The life of the individual has lost the sacred quality it is supposed to have; now everything is permitted. This abandonment of civilized norms is also clear in certain occupied territories where the occupying Power disregards the provisions of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, by subjecting civilians to the worst excesses without batting an eyelash.

At the local level, underdevelopment and poverty, the prevalence of political interests and tactics and, finally, the infiltration of alien ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour have often led to the undermining of a society, breaking the subtle balance that held it

together and toppling the system of references and the scale of values on which it was built.

But it is in particular the globalization and the growing ordinariness of violence, disseminated by the media, and sometimes practised or encouraged by States, and also the failure of the culture of solidarity, the extreme poverty rampant in the countries of the South, the extreme selfishness of the well-off minority, the lack of prospects for the great majority, human distress and despair; all these things are behind this crisis of values, which is first and foremost a crisis of confidence in man's humanity, of humanity towards itself.

Given this serious degradation of universal values and the tragedy that is the daily lot of tens of millions of children, and not just because of war, the United Nations has responsibilities to shoulder and a role to play. Of course, the international community has not been inactive in recent years, even if its efforts have scarcely been marked by the staunchness or resolve that the gravity of the situation would require.

The holding of this debate demonstrates that a real awareness is developing, an awareness that was activated near the beginning of the decade with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and continued with the ongoing drafting of the optional protocol, the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the adoption by the Security Council last year of a statement condemning abuses against children, calling upon States to comply with the norms of international law and outlining a number of steps and actions to save children from the violence of which they are victims.

Similarly, by introducing provisions relating to children in paragraph 16 of the resolution adopted last week on Sierra Leone, the Security Council took an innovative step that we hope will be taken regularly.

Africa has supported this movement and has sometimes taken the initiative, as when it adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which will enter into force as soon as 15 States ratify it. We hope this will occur in the near future.

In fact, in 1979 the member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted in Monrovia the declaration on the rights and well-being of children, followed 10 years later by the African Charter, which bans the recruitment of children under 18 years of age as soldiers and which says in its preamble that children, given their specific needs for their physical and mental development, require special attention for their health and their physical, mental, moral and social development, and require legal protection in conditions of freedom, dignity and security.

Furthermore, the OAU, at the Yaoundé summit in 1996, adopted a resolution stating that the use of children in armed conflicts was a violation of their rights and should be considered a war crime.

Finally, the thirty-fifth Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which met in Algiers from 12 to 14 July, adopted three very important resolutions dealing with this most sensitive issue, which was the subject of special attention by all member States.

In the first decision, on the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Well-being of Children, the OAU makes an urgent appeal to States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify that Charter, and it calls upon member States to work together with the United Nations Children's Fund and the OAU Secretariat, within the framework of a protocol of agreement, to speed up effective implementation of the Convention.

The second decision deals with the African Conference on the Use of Child Soldiers which was held in Maputo from 19 to 22 April this year, the outcome of which was the adoption of a declaration condemning the recruitment of children as soldiers, calling for raising the recruitment age — even for voluntary recruits — to 18 and advocating the physical and psycho-social rehabilitation of demobilized children and their reintegration into society, as well as the indictment of those who use children as soldiers.

In the Algiers decision, which refers to this conference, the summit welcomed the positive results of the Maputo meeting. It recommended the establishment of a special committee on the situation of children in armed conflict; urged States to adopt and promote norms banning the recruitment and use of child soldiers under the age of 18; and called upon the Secretary-General of the OAU to set up appropriate mechanisms to activate the process of combating this phenomenon with a view to drafting an international convention on the subject.

In the last decision, which deals with proliferation and the illicit circulation of and trafficking in small arms, the Algiers Assembly welcomed initiatives taken by member States and regional organizations concerning the

question of small arms, in particular the moratorium of the Economic Community of West African States on small arms, the destruction of surpluses of small arms and obsolete weapons in South Africa and the destruction of illicit weapons in Mozambique. The Assembly launched an appeal to the international community to give affected African countries every necessary assistance in order to enable them to implement programmes to resolve problems relating to the proliferation of small arms, and it urged the Secretary-General once again to solicit the views of member States on the proliferation and illicit circulation of and trafficking in small arms, in particular with regard to actions to be undertaken.

In that decision the summit stressed the impact of the proliferation and illicit circulation of and trafficking in small arms on the recruitment of an increased number of child soldiers and the psychological trauma resulting from this, and the need to comply with provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Well-being of Children. It also appealed to all member States of the international community to lend assistance in the psycho-social rehabilitation of children affected by the proliferation and illicit circulation of and trafficking in small arms.

In a word, by calling for compliance with relevant international and regional instruments, by taking necessary practical steps to prohibit the recruitment as soldiers of children under the age of 18 and by adopting measures against the proliferation of and the illicit trafficking in small arms, the Algiers summit has indeed proved the seriousness with which Africa intends to tackle this problem and, in so doing, indicates to the rest of the international community the path to be followed.

However, Africa cannot alone resolve the problem of children affected by conflicts. Doubtless it has today shown the political will. It has decided to declare the coming year a year of peace and stability in the continent, and for some months it has with courage and determination committed itself to resolving conflicts that ravage the continent and use up its energies and resources. But clearly it does not have the resources and it cannot do this alone — that is, without the effective mobilization of the international community and without strong support for its efforts to resolve conflicts, to consolidate peace and stability throughout the continent and to rebuild the economies that have been ravaged by wars. It cannot do this as long as the lucrative arms trafficking continues, as long as the plunder of the continent's resources goes on, as long as the sanctions imposed by the Security Council or by the OAU are circumvented and as long as, in the name of some justification or consideration, the independence and sovereignty of African States is violated.

The appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu — who succeeded Mrs. Graça Machel, a great lady from our continent whose gentle persistence has lifted the dark veil of indifference hanging over the cruel fate of children — has galvanized us all, States, intergovernmental institutions and non-governmental organizations which refuse to accept the ugly treatment meted out to children.

At the first debate the Council held on this serious question, Mr. Otunnu opened up a number of directions for possible collective action. He also urged — and he did so again today — the international community, and in particular the Security Council, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, to attack the causes of the tragedies suffered by children, that is to say, to work to prevent conflicts.

The point today is not to try to redress, to lessen or to mitigate the effects of conflicts on children. Humanitarian assistance, however necessary and welcome it may be, does indeed have its limits, and it can be misused. There is also the risk of it being used for political or media purposes — which has already happened — of it becoming a substitute for prevention and settlement of conflicts — which has already happened — and even of its being used as an alternative to development assistance, as is often the case.

In fact, the only real solution is to extirpate the roots of conflicts by, as a matter of priority in Africa, attacking the primary causes of wars — that is, the poverty, destitution and human distress which often are the breeding ground for intolerance, hatred and violence, and by working to educate children to promote a culture of peace as well as dialogue and understanding among people.

From that standpoint, it is our wish that the solemn appeal on 12 August by the United Nations Secretary-General to donor countries to provide emergency assistance in the order of $500 million for the victims of conflicts and natural disasters in Africa be promptly and totally heeded. Indeed, to repeat the language used by the Secretary-General in an interview he gave last Thursday to a European newspaper:

> "Never has Africa more needed political and financial assistance. But also, never has it been in a better position to take advantage of it."

We hope that the international community will shoulder its responsibilities to Africa, which is on the road to recovery and which intends to take its rightful place in the new world order which is being established. We hope that African children like other children in the world can once again start to dream of the day when they can be teachers, doctors or farmers — in a word, where they can become ordinary citizens of the world.

The President: I thank the representative of Algeria for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Norway. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): My delegation would like to congratulate the presidency and the Council on adopting resolution 1260 (1999) last Friday. This is proof of Namibia's wise guidance of the Council and the ability of the Council to respond to a conflict of grave consequences — not only for a member country, Sierra Leone, but for the thousands of innocents caught in the conflict, particularly children. We consider the resolution, in particular paragraphs 6 and 16, an important example of how the rights of children in armed conflict, their protection and rehabilitation, can be addressed in dealing with specific conflicts. This manifestation of the Council's will and ability to take the interests and rights of children explicitly into account in a peace settlement process bodes well for our future endeavours in this field.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for his informative briefing. His description of the current situation is the best example of the need for increased awareness and urgent action to alleviate the unacceptable situation in which a large number of children are forced to live. We therefore welcome the Security Council's again putting this important issue on its agenda. We take this as an indication that the protection and welfare of children affected by conflict is becoming a continuing concern of the Council. We also hope that the Council's deliberations can lead to agreement on concrete recommendations to improve the current situation.

Let me briefly outline some of the elements my Government believes are of key importance in this regard.

States have the primary responsibility to protect the rights and well-being of children. In those cases where the national legal framework and measures are inadequate, States have the responsibility to ensure that these inadequacies are addressed, and that the protection and welfare of children are given priority in economic and social policies.

International law has been developed, and if it is adhered to it can go a long way towards protecting the basic rights of children in armed conflict. This includes the human rights instruments, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. It is also important that the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court leaves no doubt that those who conscript or enlist children under the age of 15 into national armed forces or have them participate actively in hostilities may be punished as war criminals. Norway supported the 1998 adoption of that important new legal instrument. An important first step in alleviating the plight of children in armed conflict is for all States to comply with and respect the obligations entered into under these instruments.

The practice of hiring children as soldiers — with its related killing and maiming, sexual abuse and abductions of children, not to mention the secondary effects for the victims — is an indefensible activity which must be stopped. All parties to conflicts must also respect international humanitarian law, allowing unrestricted access for humanitarian personnel to affected populations. They must refrain from deliberately targeting civilians as part of their strategies and observe internationally accepted norms and standards. Special measures should be taken to protect the girl child from sexual and other abuse and gender-based violence.

While civilians — children being the most vulnerable among them — are increasingly victims of armed conflicts, peace negotiations and settlements often do not specifically address the situation of children. Treating the needs of children affected by armed conflicts as an afterthought may not only constitute a breach of their rights, but may also contribute to prolonging the difficult return to a normal post-conflict situation. The needs of children should therefore be explicitly and adequately addressed in peace negotiations and treaties.

The rights and needs of children should also be squarely addressed in the mandates and activities of peacekeeping operations led by the United Nations.

Anti-personnel mines and small arms constitute major difficulties in transitional post-conflict situations, contributing to destabilization and further suffering for

civilians — children not least among them. The anti-personnel landmine treaty constitutes a milestone in combating the use and stockpiling of such mines, and is a key basis for further action regarding mines. States should be encouraged to ratify the treaty and adhere to its provisions. There are also a number of international and regional efforts under way to address the problems of small arms. Norway takes an active part in these efforts. We welcome the declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States, made at their meeting in March, in Bamako, on child soldiers, as well as the plan of action for the West African moratorium on small arms. We believe these and other initiatives and measures will lead to concrete results to curb the excessive accumulation of these weapons.

Norway strongly supports the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict as advocate for the rights of children affected by armed conflict. We welcome the elaboration of programmes of action for the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Colombia and Burundi that build on the commitments from the parties elicited by the Special Representative. The success of these and other programmes will to a large extent, however, depend upon support from and close collaboration among United Nations organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations. In particular, it bears stressing that the various relevant United Nations institutions — the Special Representative, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme, to name a few — need to cooperate and coordinate in carrying out their respective roles and activities in order to be as effective in responding to the needs of children as the situation requires.

We welcome the initiative to discuss the situation of children in armed conflict in the Council. The protection and welfare of children affected by conflict deserves to be a permanent item on the Council's agenda. We hope that further developments with regard to effective measures to address the current situation, including those highlighted in this statement, can be reviewed by the Council at an appropriate future meeting.

The President: I thank the representative of Norway for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Finland. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Rasi (Finland): It is a great pleasure for me to see you, Sir, presiding over the Security Council today when the Council is debating this very important issue. I was very encouraged when you said that you would continue to work for the world's children during your forthcoming presidency of the General Assembly. You have our full support in this.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

In our days, the victims of armed conflicts are overwhelmingly civilians rather than soldiers. Civilian populations are increasingly used as battle-tools, shields and targets. Among civilians, children are particularly vulnerable. It is unacceptable that children should be among the principal victims of violent conflict and should furthermore be directly exploited to serve the interests of warring parties.

Recent studies, including that of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have shown that the use of child soldiers is increasing. Several hundred thousand have participated as combatants in recent armed conflicts. Child soldiers suffer disproportionately because of their young age. Others have fallen victim to disease, deprivation, abduction, sexual abuse and gender-based violence connected with armed conflicts. Anti-personnel landmines and small arms have a particularly devastating effect on children. We must put an end to the terrible suffering of children as the weakest group in armed conflicts. Therefore we believe that concerted political and diplomatic pressure must be exerted on, and legal action taken against, those who in situations of armed conflict violate the rights of children. Further attention has to be given to the situation of girl children in armed conflicts, and especially to protecting them against rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

We must ensure that adequate resources are devoted to the demobilization of child soldiers and to child rehabilitation programmes as an integral part of planning for post-conflict situations. Equally, we recognize the importance of action to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims of conflict. The European Union's policies already address the plight of children in armed conflicts; in some specific situations we are focusing our efforts on the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers.

Any meaningful effort to improve the plight of children affected by armed conflict requires high-level governmental and international attention. It requires the mobilization of public opinion, it requires practical action on the ground by Governments and armed opposition groups, and it requires that Governments support the activities of various organizations. The European Union underlines the need for a close partnership among the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Children's Fund and other relevant actors such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

The European Union warmly welcomes the attention given by the Security Council to the situation of children affected by armed conflict through its formal debate on 29 June 1998 and through the adoption of a presidential statement on children and armed conflict. We look forward to the adoption of a Council resolution on this subject after this debate. We also hope that the Council will persist in its vigilance and will continue to keep this issue and other issues of human rights in specific conflict and post-conflict situations at the forefront of its agenda. In the view of the European Union, it is important that the situation of children in armed conflict should also be a part of the Secretary-General's reports to the Council on individual countries. Also, in preparing thematic reports to the Council on subjects relevant to children in armed conflict he should consult with UNICEF and other concerned actors of the United Nations system.

The primary responsibility for protecting the rights of the child under all circumstances rests with States. We urge States to provide the necessary legal framework and administrative measures to protect children's rights, and furthermore to commit available human and financial resources to the realization of their rights. However, this is not enough. We must also reinvigorate international efforts to protect children. The European Union supports the work that is in progress to strengthen international human rights standards and mechanisms for enforcing international law in respect of children in situations of armed conflict. We consider the classification of the use of child soldiers as a war crime in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to be a very important step for the improvement of the protection of children. It underlines the importance of the implementation and enforcement of existing minimum age standards for the recruitment and deployment of children in armed conflict, as set by international law.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child must be extended to provide adequate protection to all children. Especially in view of the tenth anniversary of the Convention, the European Union remains fully committed to the aim of concluding successfully the negotiations on the draft optional protocol relating to the involvement of children in armed conflict. We wish to express our full support to the chairperson of the working group in her informal consultations to that end.

As a step towards improving the protection of children, we welcome the adoption by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization of the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These forms of labour include forced or compulsory recruitment for use in armed conflict.

The European Union stresses the particular importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been almost universally ratified, and of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Unfortunately, not all States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child yet.

It is the responsibility of the international community to monitor and to seek guarantees that all sides involved in conflict — governmental and non-governmental — should abide by the relevant provisions of international law in their treatment of children. The European Union gives its full support to the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to its mandate to monitor, with the support of UNICEF, the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all States parties, including those affected by armed conflict. Human rights cannot be promoted in isolation. Also, the Security Council should address the

rights of the child — for example when the Council is mandating a peacekeeping mission with tasks to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate combatants. We also recommend that whenever sanctions are adopted in the handling of crises, their impact on children be assessed and monitored, and that humanitarian exceptions be child-focused.

The European Union would like to express strong support for the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, as advocate for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The European Union also gives particular recognition to the long-standing work of UNICEF for children in situations of armed conflict. UNICEF has an extensive and permanent field presence and a comprehensive mandate that allows it to be present and operational before, during and after armed conflicts. The European Union calls on all concerned to continue to develop a concerted approach and to increase cooperation.

We fully support the efforts of the Special Representative to raise awareness and mobilize official and public opinion for action. We especially welcome his field visits to various countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. These have highlighted the plight of children in conflict situations. We commend the Special Representative's efforts to seek concrete commitments from all parties to conflicts to stop recruiting child soldiers, to demobilize and rehabilitate ex-child soldiers and to ensure children's access to humanitarian aid. We call upon States concerned and other parties to ensure follow-up to the recommendations resulting from the field visits of the Special Representative and to heed the commitments they have undertaken. It is vital that the implementation of these commitments be monitored.

The European Union also welcomes efforts in situations of peacemaking and peace-building being made to integrate a child perspective in post-conflict policies. The "peace and security agenda for children", presented at an earlier occasion to the Security Council by the Executive Director of UNICEF in her statement, contains a comprehensive set of measures on which the Council may wish to be updated at an appropriate time.

Most landmine victims are civilians. Many are children. The European Union is fully committed to the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines. We welcome the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The European Union continues to contribute significantly to mine-action programmes in many countries. Of particular importance is the extension of mine-awareness training to all children in mine-affected areas.

Among the factors which lead to a steady increase in the use of children as soldiers, we particularly wish to underline the excessive and uncontrolled accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons. Semi-automatic rifles are light enough to be carried by children even below the age of 10. In this manner, children become perpetrators as well as victims of violence. We welcome international, regional, national and subregional efforts to curb the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons. The European Union has already adopted a Joint Action on small arms and the Code of conduct on arms exports. We welcome the recommendations of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms to develop guidelines for disarming combatants with respect to small arms, light weapons and ammunition.

To conclude, let me reiterate our full commitment to working together in all bodies of the United Nations to urgently meet the needs of all the child victims of armed conflicts so as to pave the way for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. The European Union would like the United Nations system to place the issue of the rights, protection and well-being of children affected by armed conflicts within the mainstream of United Nations policy-making and programme activities. The European Union continues to devote considerable effort to addressing the needs of child victims in all parts of the world, both in terms of resourcing for and to promote a durable solution to the crises. However, the humanitarian efforts must be accompanied by broader political efforts aimed at addressing every step and aspect of the conflict. Therefore, a political solution to these crises should be rigorously pursued so as to prevent further suffering and destruction.

The President: I thank the representative of Finland for her kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Bangladesh. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Bangladesh commends the initiative of the Security Council for convening this meeting. We thank Namibia in particular for its leadership in this regard. It is a special pleasure

for me to see you, Sir, presiding over our meeting this afternoon. We are immensely honoured that this important meeting is being chaired by a person of your wisdom and eminence.

Today's meeting gives the Security Council an opportunity to follow up on the open debate we had last year on the same issue and to come up with ideas on how best the rights of children in conflict situations can be protected and also how best this issue can be brought to high-level governmental and international attention. Our deliberations today will, hopefully, help identify key action areas in a meaningful way.

Last month, the Council deliberated on the maintenance of peace and security and post-conflict peace-building. Many of us highlighted the problems of children in armed conflict in that meeting. My delegation continues to believe that no other issue has the same urgency and longer-term impact on problems relating to international peace, security and development as has that of children in conflict. Through its presidential statement of last year, the Security Council expressed its intention to pay serious attention to the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Bangladesh strongly believes that, given the seriousness and crucial importance of this issue, the time has come for the Council to adopt an appropriately articulated resolution on children and armed conflict, thereby giving real meaning to its resolve to address the issue.

This morning we heard a stimulating statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The plight of children in conflict situations, as he presented it, shocked and outraged us. Of course, the United Nations has come a long way since the Graça Machel report was presented in 1996 and is now actively engaged in mitigating the suffering of children in armed conflict with its programmes and activities. We specially thank Ambassador Olara Otunnu for his action advocacy as well as for his leadership role in this area and encourage him to continue. His office needs to be strengthened to be effective and produce results. We also encourage better coordination between different parts of the United Nations at the headquarters and field levels engaged in child-related activities. My delegation, among others, was looking forward to hearing from other key players of the United Nations. We are particularly disappointed to see that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has chosen to be absent from the debate in the Council today.

In today's wars and conflicts, the parties involved quite often have recourse to actions which constitute flagrant violations of human rights and international law, particularly humanitarian law, and the weaker and vulnerable groups of society, which include children, become the easy and innocent victims of conflicts. Abuses of the rights of children are very common in present-day wars and armed conflicts. This has been rightly termed the modern-day version of "child sacrifice". It not only robs children of their childhood but destroys productive human potential for generations.

My delegation supports the Special Representative's call for specific actions to prevent the suffering of children in conflict situations and to make a tangible difference in their lives. We believe that the international community has the ability to work together to heal the scars inflicted on children by war. The mobilization of a coordinated response to post-conflict situations is absolutely essential. The healing and rehabilitation of children should constitute a central element and not an afterthought of post-conflict peace-building programmes. Humanitarian standards and commitments must be translated into action that concretely helps endangered children. Governments should incorporate forceful child-protection elements in their domestic and foreign policies. My delegation feels that in armed conflicts, facilities meant for children, like schools, should be considered free zones. The concept of children as zones of peace needs to be realized through concrete action at all levels.

Bangladesh agrees with the Special Representative's focus on priority areas of action relating to the participation of children in armed conflict, sexual abuse and gender-based violence, mine awareness and rehabilitation of child victims, integrating standards into United Nations operations, and the impact of sanctions on children. It is important to incorporate the need for schooling and other activities to give structure to children's lives — to protect boys from being drawn into fighting and girls from being exposed to sexual exploitation.

The supply and availability of small arms has assumed a disastrous dimension for the well-being of children. We are particularly pleased that child-protection issues have been incorporated in the Statute of the International Criminal Court and that crimes of war now include recruiting children below the minimum legal age of 15 and targeting buildings and sites primarily used by children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has

the potential of addressing all of these areas in the best interests of children.

My delegation believes that the cause of children can best be served not by the actions of States alone but by all women and men through the fostering of a culture of peace and non-violence in every human being and in every sphere of activity. The elements of a culture of peace draw from age-old principles and values which are respected and held in high esteem by all peoples and societies. The Special Representative made a reference to this in his statement this morning. The objective of a culture of peace is the empowerment of people. It celebrates diversity and advances understanding and tolerance. It works against poverty and inequality and promotes development. We also believe that the international community must make greater political efforts to settle conflicts by addressing the underlying political issues. An effective humanitarian response is crucial, but it cannot substitute political will for the settlement of conflicts.

The President: I thank the representative of Bangladesh for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Japan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): First of all, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for your strong leadership and thoughtful guidance in convening this meeting. This meeting, stimulated by the strong appeal made this morning by Mr. Otunnu and featuring the participation of many non-members of the Security Council, will no doubt help demonstrate that the international community is strongly committed to making headway in resolving what is plainly a serious problem: the victimization and abuse of children in armed conflicts.

Given the continuing tragedy of children victimized or abused in armed conflicts, it is evident that concerted international efforts to protect children from the damaging impact of armed conflicts are more pressing than ever. In this context, the Government of Japan welcomes the humanitarian missions and advocacy vigorously and effectively carried out to date by Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Most importantly, his missions have gained specific commitments to protect children from conflicting parties in the Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and Colombia. This is a highly commendable and reassuring achievement, although the obtained commitments must be put into action by all the parties concerned.

It must also be noted that Mr. Otunnu's activities have shed light not only on the plight of children, but also on the brutality of armed conflicts themselves. This lends the cause of conflict prevention yet another forcefully persuasive voice.

With all of this in mind, we, the Government of Japan, will continue to support the work of the Special Representative as he tackles the most humanitarian yet most daunting task of protecting children from the savagery of armed conflicts.

Mr. Otunnu rightly suggests in his report that

> "the most important and pressing challenge today is how to translate existing standards and commitments into action that can make a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground." (*A/53/482, para. 140*)

In order to meet this challenge, we still need a great deal of advocacy and robust efforts to make the Governments and peoples concerned, let alone the conflicting parties involved, recognize the utmost importance of protecting children from the danger of armed conflicts, and, in the final analysis, the importance of preventing the occurrence and recurrence of armed conflicts.

We therefore welcome this opportunity. I believe that the Security Council's focus on this issue will help greatly to enhance the level of concern of the international community about this most taxing problem of today's world.

For its part, Japan hosted a symposium last November entitled "Children and Armed Conflict", with the cooperation of the office of the Special Representative, the United Nations University and the Japan Committee for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Senior officials from Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and leaders of civil society from the Asia-Pacific and other regions, gathered in Tokyo for that symposium, called for urgent, concerted action to protect children from being victimized in conflicts.

Landmines and small arms are two issues which we regard it imperative to tackle from the viewpoint of

protecting children from the impact of armed conflicts. Japan advocates the "Zero Victims" programme with respect to the question of land mines, and for this purpose has pledged financial support of approximately 10 billion yen for mine clearance and victim assistance for the five-year period starting last year. With regard to the question of small arms, we are encouraged by the recent submission to the Secretary-General of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms.

Obviously, the most effective way of protecting children from conflicts is to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of conflicts. While conflict prevention is one of the most pressing and difficult issues in many parts of the world, a better understanding of the plight of children who are victimized or abused during the course of conflicts would hopefully work to make all concerned more seriously committed to the cause of conflict prevention, as well as to the efforts to eliminate the dangers of landmines and small arms. This makes the issue we address today doubly important.

The Japanese Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, considers it important to cope with the issues the world faces today and in the future with a primary focus on human security: the protection of the dignity, basic rights and well-being of human beings. The protection of children from all kinds of danger and maltreatment is at the heart of human security considerations.

I therefore want to emphasize again the Japanese Government's commitment to the cause of protecting children from conflicts.

The President: I thank the representative of Japan for his kind words addressed to me.

In accordance with the decision taken earlier in the meeting, I invite the Permanent Observer of Switzerland to the United Nations to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, first I should like to congratulate you and your country for having taken the initiative to conduct this important debate and to thank you for allowing Switzerland to address the Security Council.

As the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, Switzerland attaches great importance to compliance with the legal norms applicable in armed conflict. Switzerland would like to recall that the Conventions are universally applicable and that it highlights the responsibility of States, in accordance with common article 1, to respect and ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions. Failure to respect provisions protecting vulnerable groups frequently involves all the parties to the conflict, State and non-State parties alike. The responsibility of States, however, is of primary importance, and the Security Council must take this into account and act accordingly.

Children are doubly vulnerable in conflict situations. They can be victims of conflicts that affect them physically and mentally while they are still developing physically and mentally. Children continue to be recruited and utilized in armed conflicts by Governments or armed opposition groups before reaching 18 years of age. As combatants, these children become legitimate targets under international law. Moreover, because of their age, they are particularly susceptible to indoctrination or drugs, thereby often becoming tools of grave violations of international law. The plight of girls and boys who are forced into prostitution, sexually abused, humiliated, brutalized and frequently kidnapped or subjected to forced displacement is also particularly alarming.

My country would like to emphasize in this regard the importance of the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations Children's Fund as well as by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and calls upon parties to conflict to comply with the recommendations made. Switzerland has supported and will continue to support in the future the work of the Special Representative, as well as the work of the relevant agencies.

The increase in extreme and cynical forms of violence, as well as the rapid breakdown of fundamental values and the legal framework, must spur us to develop a more sophisticated strategy of protection. What could be some of the elements of such a strategy?

First, we must reinforce the legal framework as well as the implementation mechanisms. Switzerland is convinced that in order to ensure better protection it is particularly important to raise the minimum age for recruitment, whether voluntary or mandatory, to 18 years of age for regular armed forces or armed opposition groups, for direct or indirect participation in armed conflict. This objective could be achieved through the negotiations under way in the Working Group entrusted

with the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. My country has supported raising the minimum age at previous meetings of that Working Group and will continue to support it in the January 2000 session in the hope that such a legal instrument will be adopted.

Switzerland has also supported the activities undertaken by the coalition to put an end to the utilization of child soldiers since its establishment in Geneva in June 1998. My country is pleased that the efforts undertaken by this group of non-governmental organizations has made it increasingly possible to mobilize the international community. Switzerland is gratified that the declarations adopted at the Maputo and Montevideo conferences support raising the recruitment age and the age of participation in armed conflict to 18 years of age.

Secondly, growing attention on the part of the international community is now focused on the social reintegration of combatants who were recruited and utilized under 18 years of age. Efforts must continue in that direction. Switzerland is convinced that better coordination efforts in this connection are also necessary. We think it is particularly important that actors from the political, humanitarian and development domains prepare joint strategies in order to avoid overlapping and to create new structures.

Thirdly, the Security Council, because of its particular competence, could more explicitly support law and fundamental values. Whenever it addresses parties to a conflict, it could recall the applicability of international humanitarian law, as well as humanitarian standards and human rights. This is particularly important with regard to access for humanitarian personnel. The Council could also encourage the dissemination of the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Council could call upon the parties to refrain from recruiting, in peacetime or wartime, children under the age of 18 and, if necessary, to demobilize and reintegrate into society this category of combatants. It could ensure that its peacekeeping operations benefit from the knowledge of experts on the rights of the child, and that dimension could be fully incorporated into peacekeeping operations. The Council could regularly request the Secretary-General to provide information, analyses and proposals for action to support children. It could encourage United Nations agencies and States to initiate strategies, projects and programmes specifically focused on the needs of children.

It could systematically draw the attention of parties negotiating a peace accord to the importance of taking the plight of children into account. More generally, it could encourage States to prepare their armed forces to meet the specific needs of particularly vulnerable groups, such as children. Finally, the Council itself could conclude without delay efforts already undertaken regarding targeted sanctions in order to ensure that there are humanitarian exceptions for vulnerable groups, children being particularly affected by such sanctions.

Switzerland hopes that during this year of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, on the eve of the Twenty-seventh International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, 10 years after the adoption of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2 years after the adoption of the Ottawa Convention, 1 year after the adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, that a new stage in the protection of victims of armed conflict can be entered. This should be done through the determined will of the international community to speedily reach an agreement on how best to protect children in armed conflicts.

The President: I thank the representative of Switzerland for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Costa Rica. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): May I first of all, Mr. Minister, congratulate you most sincerely and wish you success in your work as President of the Security Council and as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia. For the United Nations and for the international community in general it is a cause for particular satisfaction to see you in such a lofty and important position.

A year ago, Ms. Graça Machel, then the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children, reported to us that recently more than a quarter million children had participated as combatants in approximately 30 armed conflicts. More than 2 million children died in those wars, more than 4 million were handicapped, more than 1 million were orphaned and approximately 12 million lost their homes.

While these figures are alarming, there can be no doubt that in the past year they have only increased. But the figures still hide the reality. It is impossible to express the profound fear of the children who flee the flames and the bombs. It is impossible to describe the terror of children when they see their parents murdered. Is it possible to imagine the pain of 4 million handicapped children? Is it possible to grasp the dreams, hopes and promise of 2 million murdered children? Is it possible to measure so much sadness and so much happiness lost? Children are the first victims of wars and the most defenceless.

The time for action has come. First of all, we must at all costs avoid the participation of minors in armed conflicts. For this purpose, it must be universally declared that the participation of those under 18 years of age in armed conflict as combatants or as support staff for the armed forces is unacceptable.

All States must commit themselves to refraining from recruiting minors. In this connection, appropriate and effective procedures must be adopted to check the age of recruits and support staff. Governments must demobilize the minors that are already in their armed forces or their support staff and must give them psychological and social assistance so as to enable them to be fully and completely rehabilitated and reincorporated into society. Government authorities must impose penal sanctions on those who use, recruit or promote the participation of minors in armed conflict and must guarantee that minors in military schools will not be considered or used as part of their armed forces.

With regard to internal armed conflicts, it is indispensable for the international community to declare unacceptable the use of minors in armed forces opposing the Government. All States and groups with influence on such forces must pressure them so that they will refrain from recruiting minors and will demobilize the minors who already participate in their armed forces or support staff. Governments must promote the social reintegration of minors demobilized from the armed forces and provide them the necessary social and psychological assistance. All parties to a conflict must provide captured minors the best possible conditions with a view to ensuring their speedy rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Internationally, we must urgently adopt the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, as is currently being discussed in the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights, which would declare 18 years as the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces. Members of the Security Council who here in New York lament the effects of armed conflicts on minors bear a particular responsibility in this connection and must show leadership and commitment by supporting this proposal in Geneva.

It is also necessary to adopt additional measures to prevent children from becoming victims of armed conflicts. We must ensure that indiscriminate methods or practices of warfare must be prohibited. Any attack targeting the civilian population is unjustified, immoral and clearly prohibited by international humanitarian law. Similarly, the use of weapons with indiscriminate or long-lasting effects must be eliminated. We are particularly pleased to note the rapid entry into force of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines, which have killed so many people in Central America. However, further efforts must be urgently made to deactivate the anti-personnel mines still on the ground.

In the context of the work of the Security Council, studies must be conducted on possible impacts on the vulnerable population, especially on children, before any sanctions regime is adopted. We must ensure that those regimes include measures that will minimize their harmful effects on minors. Any peacekeeping operation must also have a humanitarian component that is specially trained to deal with the problems of minors. Moreover, intensive efforts are necessary to provide humanitarian assistance to minors during armed conflicts, as this is a particularly vulnerable sector of the population.

To sum up, in order to ensure minimal conditions for minors in situations of armed conflict, it is necessary to ensure full compliance with the provisions of international humanitarian law and human rights. This, however, is merely the first step.

We must acknowledge that as long as war exists, it will be impossible to free minors from its harmful consequences. As long as armed conflict exists, there will be orphans, as well as displaced, maimed and murdered children. As long as there are wars, schools, hospitals, roads and families will be destroyed. As long as there is armed conflict, it will be impossible to ensure the full development of minors into worthy, productive and creative persons; it will be impossible to ensure minimal conditions for the development of the human being.

The real way of solving the problem of the adverse effect of armed conflict on minors is by eliminating such conflicts. The international community must create a real culture of peace in which political, economic and social differences are resolved by peaceful and democratic means. We must build a society where dialogue prevails over weapons, a society in which families take precedence over military barricades, a society in which armies are superfluous and in which State investment is devoted to education, health and culture.

Today we need coordinated action by the international community to adopt effective measures to resolve the situation of children in armed conflict. In this context, we attach particular importance to the work carried out by the Secretary-General and especially by his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu.

Costa Rica trusts that the necessary will to achieve this end will continue to be expressed through action taken both by the Security Council and by the rest of the international community.

The President: I thank the representative of Costa Rica for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of the Republic of Korea. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Lee (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to offer my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Sir, and Ambassador Andjaba for taking the initiative of organizing this open debate on the important issue of children and armed conflict. I am particularly honoured to participate in this debate under the presidency of Your Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia.

My delegation welcomes today's meeting as a timely effort to build on the previous Council debate, of June last year, on the same subject. I also note that this meeting is yet another step forward towards promoting transparency in the work of the Council. I am particularly grateful to my dear friend, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, for his informative and inspiring statement.

Almost a decade after the end of the cold war, the rampaging ethnic conflicts within national boundaries still persist, inflicting a heavy toll, particularly on children, the most vulnerable component of our societies. Given the appalling statistics presented by Mr. Otunnu time and again, children remain exposed to unspeakable suffering and mistreatment in situations of armed conflict. These harsh realities, unfortunately, overshadow the significance of celebrating the anniversaries of the entry into force of the important international instruments for the protection of children in armed conflict: the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. As we celebrate these instruments, we have to use this unique opportunity to rekindle our commitment to the protection and welfare of children in conflict situations. In this connection, we welcome last year's adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which provides for jurisdiction over several child-specific crimes.

Ambassador Otunnu, as always, today before the Council made another thoughtful, thought-provoking statement that covered wide-ranging issues of importance. As the *New York Times* reported on 8 August, there is growing recognition of Ambassador Otunnu's activities by the international community. My delegation takes this opportunity to pay high tribute to Ambassador Otunnu and his office for their tireless efforts to advance the cause of the protection of children in armed conflict, and for what they have achieved so far. We also commend the work done by the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other agencies in this field.

We strongly urge the Security Council to continue to expand its involvement in this issue. My delegation will therefore welcome the adoption by the Council today of a draft resolution that endorses a number of recommendations contained in Mr. Otunnu's reports and his statement. We hope that this draft resolution will serve as a firm basis for further Council actions in the months to come.

Having said that, allow me to make a few points that in our view warrant the urgent attention and action of the international community. First of all, my delegation believes that the issue of child soldiers constitutes the most challenging part of today's subject and should be addressed immediately. From the lessons learned during recent conflicts, it has become clear that the problem of child soldiers requires a comprehensive approach ranging from peacekeeping to post-conflict peace-building activities.

It is indeed a daunting task to disarm child soldiers and to keep them from rearming. My delegation is of the view that the Security Council should take a more

proactive role in ensuring that the long-term rehabilitation of child soldiers is dealt with from the early planning stages of peacekeeping operations.

Secondly, my delegation believes that it is important to widen and strengthen the institutional safety net to prevent the practice of recruiting child soldiers, as the recruitment of child soldiers increases their chances of falling victim to armed conflicts. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the prevailing recognition by the international community of the need to raise the existing legal standards. We note that the United Nations has taken the lead by announcing its unilateral decision last year not to recruit peacekeepers below the age of 18 from Member States.

In particular, the Working Group on the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been considering raising the minimum age for recruiting soldiers. We hope that, sooner rather than later, the Working Group will put forward practical recommendations acceptable to the majority of United Nations Members.

Thirdly, we believe that in order to prevent the use of child soldiers, the Security Council should be vigilant against the supply of small arms and light weapons in actual and potential conflict areas. Small arms are considered physically best matched to child soldiers, who can only carry light weapons. In this regard, we welcome the ongoing efforts of the Council to enhance the effective implementation of the arms embargoes already imposed. The need for appropriate monitoring and strict enforcement of arms embargoes cannot be overstated.

Finally, I would like to welcome the recent Secretary-General's bulletin regarding the observance by United Nations forces of international humanitarian law, which was issued and became effective on the recent occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. This bulletin, setting out fundamental principles and rules of international humanitarian law applicable to forces under United Nations command and control, stipulates special respect and protection for children by United Nations forces in operations. We hope that this bulletin will also serve as an example for all parties in conflict situations to follow.

Since children are our hope for the future, all of us have a special obligation to support and protect them from the evil of conflict. More often than not, children do not understand why they have to be involved in conflicts and suffer from them. Given how much they trust and rely on adults as their protectors, we adults must not betray their trust, but provide them with an environment suitable for their safety and welfare. My delegation wishes to reaffirm the strong commitment of the Republic of Korea to continue to contribute to the international community's efforts to create a safer and better environment for children in conflict situations.

The President: I thank the representative of the Republic of Korea for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of India. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Sharma (India): Let me thank the delegation of Namibia for providing an opportunity to all Member States to share their views on this important issue through an open debate. We are honoured, Mr. Minister, that you are chairing this meeting.

The activism of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, together with Ms. Graça Machel's landmark study, has raised awareness of the extent and nature of the grave problem of children in armed conflict and deserves our appreciation. We support the Special Representative's humanitarian diplomacy.

Innocents have been massacred in the past to prove a tyrannical point or in the flush of victory, at the sack of a city or fort. However, as Ms. Machel noted, in most tribal warfare, fought between adults in accordance with strict codes, the killing of children was taboo. Those taboos have been eroded in the course of this century, which has pretensions to enlightenment, by the concept of total war, in which no distinction is made between civilians and soldiers or between adults and children, and by the cynical exploitation and creation of conflict situations by elements free of conscience. Children and women died in concentration camps in Europe and outside Europe, and they were the ones who were killed in the largest numbers in indiscriminate air raids in the Second World War. The unprotected are of course the most vulnerable. The abiding image which a generation retains of the mindless sweep of war is of a little girl running in terror, set on fire by napalm. Those that wield the most power should be most aware that the systems of war that have been practised this century, and the means developed to fight such wars, have made it inevitable that

in conflicts everywhere traditional restraints would be weakened or abandoned, and the impact on children of armed conflicts would increase.

Our discussion takes place near the twenty-fifth anniversary of the General Assembly Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, and as we are moving towards the end-of-decade review of the goals of the World Summit for Children. At least in the impact of armed conflict on children, these goals have not been met. The statistics are numbing: over 2 million killed; over a million orphaned; more than 6 million seriously injured or permanently disabled; 12 million made homeless; and 10 million left with serious psychological trauma. Add to these the number of young girls subjected to the horror and pain of sexual violence. All this has been in the past decade alone. And sadly, the tragedy continues. There is a special tragic poignancy in the inability not only to give protection to children, who personify innocence, trust and our hope for the future, but in the merciless betrayal and exploitation of that innocence.

Faced with this, there are a few points of action on which we must agree, and try to implement. First, children must not be recruited for warfare; democratic Governments do not recruit them. In some States, voluntary enlistment is permitted below the age of 18, but not deployment; and the recruits are trained to serve their country according to the laws of war while in service, and thereafter voluntarily to make the transition to civilian life. This is not the case with the real culprits, the non-State actors — armed rebels, insurgent outfits and terrorist organizations — which recruit children, often forcibly, because they are malleable and strangers to danger, and are therefore convenient instruments for mindless violence. What must be addressed is the recruitment and use of children by terrorists and insurgents.

This is indeed the crux of the problem. Terrorists and others of that ilk have no interest in humanitarian law, or in international standards and local norms of behaviour. The Council is apparently as impotent as any other body when it comes to holding these malign forces accountable. Regrettably, international cooperation on the global menace of terrorism either does not exist or is inadequate. The Council has certainly not addressed this problem, though it is perhaps the most insidious and serious threat to the security of all States, particularly open democracies. Nevertheless, while the global problem awaits the urgent attention it needs, the Council must consider ways to stop terrorists and warlords from using children in armed conflict. Frequently these groups have State sponsors, without whose support they would not be able to survive. Suitable Council action against this phenomenon would be appropriate.

Let me say that, while in principle we support the humanitarian diplomacy of the Special Representative aimed at the better protection of children in armed conflict, great care must be taken to ensure that nothing in this work inadvertently lends legitimacy to terrorists, criminals and others who use violence to destabilize or challenge democratically elected Governments. While it may be necessary for him to intercede with them, this should not confer upon them the status or respectability of a negotiating partner, particularly as they seek to undermine Governments through force.

A further point that should be borne in mind relates to the problem of access to populations in distress. It has been recommended from time to time, including by the Special Representative, that the international community needs to insist on this access. We understand the reasons given for this demand. However, this is a complex problem, to which there are no simple answers. The Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights adopted, late last week, a resolution expressing its firmest conviction that the so-called duty and right to carry out "humanitarian intervention", in particular by means of the threat or use of force, is juridically totally unfounded under current general international law and consequently cannot be considered a justification for violations of the principles of *jus cogens* enshrined in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations. This is a particularly important point, and one that we need to bear in mind.

Secondly, children must not be indoctrinated or trained to fight. To our regret, we see around us, including in our region, some schools and seminaries being misused to instil in young and impressionable minds negative passions of hatred and intolerance. These youngsters are then sent to Afghanistan and elsewhere as cannon-fodder. Those who survive have skills for nothing else. Stopping educational institutions from being misused would be a check on the recruitment of children — whose lives are blighted or extinguished before they can flower — as mercenaries.

Thirdly, trafficking in small arms and light weapons, which often provokes and always sustains conflicts, must be brought under control. In her study, Ms. Machel noted that because modern small arms are

indeed small and light, they are easily handled by children. The overwhelming majority of the 300,000 children under 16 who are combatants in armed conflict fight with weapons smuggled in to their controllers. The General Assembly has considered for a number of years how to tackle this fundamental problem; it needs to urgently consider how to stop the flow of illegal arms.

The vast numbers of children affected and traumatized by armed conflict cast a long shadow over future generations. But, more quietly, though inexorably, the economic and social marginalization of the poorest nations is driving hundreds of millions more into the kind of childhood that could well make them part of tomorrow's problems rather than of tomorrow's solutions. Four years ago, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s *The State of the World's Children* report put it very well:

> "For many millions of families in the poorest villages and urban slums of the developing world, the daily consequences of these economic forces, over which they have no control, is that they are unable to put enough food on the table, unable to maintain a home fit to live in, unable to dress and present themselves decently, unable to protect health and strength, unable to keep their children in school. Through such processes, millions have become destitute and desperate."

We need to address this broader picture, the destitution and desperation that claim even more lives than armed conflict and that often pave the way for a fresh cycle of violence. This, unfortunately, does not attract the attention of the international media, nor can it be an issue on the mandate of the Security Council, but in our discussions here we need to make sure that our focus is not distorted and that we do not lose sight of the larger emergency which faces us and which constitutes a global challenge.

We are happy that UNICEF has always promoted these broad concerns. Within that framework, it has undertaken an intensive follow-up to Graça Machel's study. Its work in ending the use of child soldiers, limiting the impact of sanctions on children and providing better protection and security for children and women in conflict situations deserves our recognition. We specially commend its leadership in bringing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, an effort to which India has contributed. As Ms. Machel noted, very little has been reported about the conflicts in Afghanistan and Angola. We also recognize the outstanding work carried out by the World Food Programme (WFP), in difficult circumstances and often at great risk to its staff.

The recommendations that Executive Director Carol Bellamy made to the Security Council on 12 February this year merit urgent consideration. We believe that the Council should concentrate on those items which are both "doable" and within its mandate, focusing on those of its actions which, in a conflict or after it, could affect the interests of children. The most important of these, of course, are sanctions, which, as the Executive Director of UNICEF urged, should not be imposed without obligatory, immediate and enforceable humanitarian exemptions. UNICEF's report on the situation of children in Iraq, where the gains made over several years have been undone under a Security Council sanctions regime, is a case in point. The extreme impact on child malnutrition and on child and maternal mortality and illiteracy in countries subjected to comprehensive sanctions must be addressed. This is something within the competence of the Security Council and would go a long way towards alleviating the suffering of children, many of whom have spent their entire childhood in situations of conflict.

The Council should also ensure that the peacekeeping operations it mandates promote the welfare of children. We are pleased that the Special Representative is coordinating his work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We also note that the Secretary-General has recently issued a bulletin on the observance of international humanitarian law by United Nations peacekeepers. This is a welcome development, since there have been recent incidents in which some contingents have been accused of ill-treating children in the host populations where they were deployed as peacekeeping forces.

We also agree that the needs of children should be at the centre of post-conflict peace-building. We recognize the need for special efforts to undo the damage to the psyche of children who have participated in or are victims of armed conflict. Even during a conflict, such actions as "days of tranquillity" to provide for the immunization of children may bring some relief. Action by the international community on these points would be led by the United Nations funds and programmes, the United Nations agencies or by the Bretton Woods institutions, as mandated by their respective governing bodies.

While the Security Council can play an important role in protecting the interests of children in the decisions it takes on peacekeeping operations, situations of armed conflict and the sanctions that it imposes, the problem has far wider ramifications and thus goes beyond the Council's mandate. It is the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council which are the right forums for a comprehensive examination of this global problem and we trust that they will continue to address the many issues involved.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Portugal. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Monteiro (Portugal): It is good to see you back at work, Sir, in this Organization that you know so well. The Security Council can profit today from your exceptional expertise, as much, I am sure, as the General Assembly will benefit in the months to come from your leadership. Let me also congratulate you for the exceptional manner in which Ambassador Andjaba and the delegation of your country have conducted the work of the Council this month and, in particular, for the organization of this open debate.

For my delegation, it is indeed an honour to be here today at a meeting presided over by Namibia on a subject to which my delegation is particularly attached. As you might recall, it was under the presidency of Portugal, in June last year, that a debate of the Council open to all Members of the United Nations first took place on this very important topic. It is therefore a particular pleasure for me to be able to participate at this meeting. Let me stress, too, that Portugal fully subscribes to the statement made earlier by the Presidency of the European Union.

Graça Machel, in her report on the impact of armed conflicts on children, submitted to the General Assembly in 1996, revealed to the international community the extent of suffering by child victims of armed conflicts throughout the world. The painful awareness of this scourge led the Members of the United Nations to request the Secretary-General to name a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict — Ambassador Olara Otunnu — whose role must be praised and whose presence here today I would like to welcome. I commend him for the active way he is carrying out his mandate. His efforts to raise worldwide awareness and to mobilize official and public opinion for the protection of children affected by armed conflict are bearing visible results. His recent visits to Africa — Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda — and to Colombia, as well as his special agenda for action for the children of Kosovo have shown in a very concrete way how to place the protection and welfare of children on the peace agenda.

I welcome his intention to undertake a mission to Sierra Leone later this month, and I hope that a coordinated and concerted response to the dramatic situation of children in that country can be achieved as soon as possible. As a member of the Group of Friends of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I would like to reaffirm the support of Portugal for the work of Olara Otunnu and his team. Let me also voice my delegation's strong support for the important set of proposals announced today by Ambassador Otunnu, which will pave the way for the full concretization of the concept of children as a zone of peace.

Since last year's presidential statement, the Security Council has shown an increasing awareness of the impact of armed conflict on children. At that time, the Council highlighted some important elements that remain essential for decisions and further action on this issue.

Let me recall some of these elements, to which my delegation continues to be fully committed: the condemnation of the targeting of children in armed conflicts, including the recruitment and use of children in hostilities in violation of international law; the need to consider means to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to civilian populations in distress, in particular women and children; the need to pursue efforts aiming at the disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and the reintegration into society of children maimed or otherwise traumatized; the need to support and promote child-focused mine clearance and mine-awareness programmes, as well as child-centred physical and social rehabilitation programmes; and the importance of providing special training to personnel involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities concerning the needs, interests and rights of children, as well as their treatment and protection.

Last year's presidential statement was a first step towards raising awareness of the relevance of these concerns to the field of international peace and security. Since then, the Security Council has continued actively to follow this issue.

I would like in this context also to underline the intention of the Council to follow closely the situation of children affected by armed conflicts and in particular to

maintain contact regularly, as appropriate, with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and with the relevant programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations system. These include, in the lead, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which has deployed a notable effort to alert us to the dimensions of the problem and to promote action designed to counter it. Through specific activities at the national level in the various countries affected by conflicts, UNICEF has managed to achieve surprising results. To name just one case, in Angola, a country devastated by war, it was possible to negotiate temporary ceasefires to allow for the vaccination of children and provide critical life support. In other situations, UNICEF continues to provide training on child protection, gender, humanitarian principles and child-soldier demobilization for United Nations personnel to be deployed in peacekeeping operations, as was the case recently in East Timor.

But there is also the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance and other United Nations Secretariat departments, and, finally, the international financial institutions — namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). My delegation believes that there is a need for a global effort. States, United Nations bodies and agencies and other relevant humanitarian organizations should give priority to respect for the rights of the child in complex humanitarian emergencies, in particular armed conflicts and post-conflict situations.

In the same vein, I would like to praise the continuous interest of the Council in these topics and to highlight the initiative of Ambassador Fowler of Canada in organizing last February an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The impact on children emerged naturally as a central focus in the debate.

I was particularly struck by the statement made on that occasion by the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, and in particular by her reference to what she termed "a peace and security agenda for children", the main elements of which should guide, in our view, the action of all States and Organizations in this common goal.

My delegation looks forward to the next report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is expected to be issued next month, and which will certainly include one chapter on the protection of children.

The basic legal framework to ensure the fulfilment of this common goal is in place and continues remarkably and enthusiastically to be adhered to by the international community.

First, there is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The almost universal ratification of that Convention — the first to include humanitarian law among its provisions to protect children in time of war and conflict — in such a short period of time clearly demonstrates the will of the international community to achieve this objective. While setting a standard of the universal determination of States to protect the rights of the child, the Convention, however, reflects an ideal world still far from reality. We must find a way to breach the gap that exists between this commitment by so many States and the reality, including, and in particular, those participating in or suffering the effects of armed conflicts. The Security Council must play a particular role in this respect. It must be vigilant and active, urging and helping the parties concerned to comply with their obligations freely assumed under the Convention and other instruments of international law.

The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court is another example of the determination of the international community to protect victims of serious crimes in the context of armed conflicts. Portugal, a signatory of the Statute, is aware of the need for such an international instrument and is now undertaking the necessary process of ratification. The flow of signatures of the Statute and the increasing number of ratifying States is encouraging and reassures us that in the near future this Court will be established and ready to help bring to justice those who commit serious crimes against civilians, including the most vulnerable of them: women and children. In this context, it need hardly be underlined that the Council also has a crucial role to play, as conferred by the Statute.

My Government thanks you once again, Mr. President, for the initiative to hold this open debate and welcomes the opportunity for the Security Council to keep children as a distinct and central concern of its agenda. But we also encourage the Council to pursue all the necessary efforts towards achieving an effective protection of children. For that purpose, and in order to ensure an effective follow-up to the open debate, it is important to achieve and promote the mainstreaming of

the situation of the rights of children in the various activities of the Council, including in the context of specific country situations. In that same vein, we strongly believe that it would be very useful if, in future, the Secretary-General's reports to the Council included a section with relevant information on this issue; I think that Mr. Olara Otunnu underlined this aspect this morning. Special attention should also be given by the Council to the protection and respect of the rights of children, namely through the mandates conferred by it to peacekeeping and peace-building operations.

Finally, in its debates on thematic and country-related issues, it is fundamental that the Council increasingly seek the views of relevant United Nations agencies. With their operational experience, they can decisively enrich the debate and inform the decisions to be adopted by the Security Council, while being key allies in support of the implementation of decisions taken.

I wish to underline once again that, as I said, it is crucial that the Security Council continue to devote further attention to the question of children and armed conflict, ensuring follow-up of last year's presidential statement and of the draft resolution that will be adopted later today. In doing so, it will be essential to maintain a very close working relationship with Special Representative Olara Otunnu and the relevant agencies, programmes and funds of the United Nations.

The President: I thank the representative of Portugal for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Iraq. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, we are pleased and honoured to see you presiding over this open meeting of the Security Council. We wish to extend our thanks to you and to the delegation of Namibia for taking the initiative of convening this meeting while Namibia is presiding over the Council. We hope that the views to be expressed by States during the course of this open meeting will lead to breaking down the wall of silence surrounding this important subject.

We also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its Executive Director, Ms. Bellamy, for their strenuous efforts made for the protection of children.

The subject of protecting children in armed conflict is at the heart of the purpose for which the United Nations was created, that is, saving coming generations from the scourge of war and affirming belief in man's basic human rights and in the individual's dignity and destiny. The international community has adopted much legislation designed to safeguard the child's protection and well-being, particularly in cases of armed conflict, such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 protocols. Regrettably, that legislation is not being implemented.

We believe serious progress in making children a zone of peace stems from a more comprehensive objective: making the entire world a zone of peace and prosperity through harnessing the efforts of the international community to redress the root causes of conflicts. These are particularly poverty and deteriorating socio-economic situations, which are worsening due to the international financial crisis that in a global economy widens the gap between the States of the North and the South. The North alone possesses authority, power, money and advanced technology, leaving States of the South with the poverty, illiteracy, hunger, unemployment and intolerance that are fertile ground for violence and conflict.

Debate on this topic in the Security Council must not in any way detract from the competence and views of the organ in which all United Nations Member States are represented: the General Assembly. Given its structure and the present balance of power, the Security Council is unable to offer creative solutions. Since the issuance of its presidential statement on this subject on 29 June 1998, the Council's conduct only gives rise to false hopes. The Security Council itself constitutes part of the problem. The proverb says: First, one cannot give what one does not have. For instance, under United States pressure, the Council insists on the continued enforcement of comprehensive sanctions against Iraq. These sanctions have caused the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children under five years of age, as indicated in the recent UNICEF report. Sanctions have also been the cause of death of more than a million Iraqi citizens from the other groups, particularly women and the elderly. Yet, the crime persists.

This situation makes sanctions effectively equal to threats emanating from armed conflict. Is this the objective of sanctions, as provided for in the Charter? Definitely not.

Prior to the imposition of sanctions on Iraq, according to statistics of the United Nations and its specialized agencies — some of which are contained in Ambassador Amorim's report submitted to the Security Council on 30 March 1999 — Iraq succeeded in achieving a level of socio-economic development that surpassed the average development indicators of countries in the region and in developing countries in general. The gross domestic product was 10.4 per cent between the 1974 and 1980. Before the imposition of sanctions, Iraq enjoyed the highest per capita nutritional food basket in the region. Ninety-seven per cent of our urban population and 78 per cent of our rural population had gained full access to medical care. The Iraqi Government made huge investments in the fields of education and illiteracy eradication, and it successfully applied the principle of compulsory primary education.

Then comprehensive sanctions were imposed on Iraq on 6 August 1990. By all standards, these are a form of collective punishment imposed on the people of Iraq. These sanctions moved Iraq from a state of relative prosperity into full poverty, as described by Ambassador Amorim in his aforementioned report. The matter is inextricably linked with children, as they constitute the prime victims of these sanctions. Infant mortality rates have risen to be among the highest of the world. Serious malnutrition hits more than a quarter of the children of Iraq. Today, only 41 per cent of the Iraqi population has potable water. Eighty-three per cent of the Iraqi schools require major repairs.

The UNICEF report published on 12 August 1999, which contains the results of field surveys on child mortality rates in Iraq conducted between February and May 1999, reveals the disastrous effects of sanctions.

The field surveys covering 24,000 families have demonstrated that the mortality rates of children below the age of five have doubled from 56 per 1,000 live births from 1984 to 1989 to 131 per 1,000 live births from 1994 to 1999. Infant mortality rates have also risen from 47 to 108 deaths per 1,000 live births for the same periods. The maternal mortality rate rose to 294 deaths per 100,000 live births.

The UNICEF report states that the deaths of more than half a million Iraqi children below the age of five for the period 1991 to 1998 could have been avoided had it not been for the imposition of comprehensive sanctions against Iraq.

The above figures leave no doubt that a crime of genocide is being perpetrated against Iraqi children through the imposition of sanctions, which coincides with an equally horrible crime: the use by the United States and the United Kingdom of depleted uranium during their aggression against Iraq in 1991. In the first year of their use, these radioactive shells led to the deaths of 50,000 Iraqi children exposed to deadly doses of radiation unleashed by the use of those weapons. The children of Iraq continue to suffer from leukaemia and other kinds of cancer. The newborn are maimed as a result of the use of that weapon. This radioactive agent is 5.5 billion years old — the age of the Earth.

In addition, the children of Iraq are suffering because of the no-flight zones illegally imposed on Iraq since 1991. The imposition of such zones and the more than 250,000 sorties flown by British and American planes over Iraqi cities and villages strike terror into the hearts of Iraqi children. They are sometimes targeted by the American smart bombs. Is there any graver violation of international humanitarian law? How is it possible for the Security Council to ignore the crimes being perpetrated by the United States and Great Britain in the Council's name and in excess of its mandate?

Coincidentally, the Security Council is considering the question of child protection just a few days after the issuance of the UNICEF report that highlights the role of the Council. The Security Council and the United Nations as a whole must resolve this grave situation and assume responsibility in a sound manner in conformity with the Charter.

The United States has greatly offended the United Nations by using it as a tool for the genocide it is perpetrating against Iraq and its children. Is there a greater affront to the United Nations than that hurled by James Rubin, Spokesman for the State Department, when he declared at the Democratic Party convention held in August 1996 that the United Nations could only do what the United States let it do, or by James Baker, the former Secretary of State, who said in a meeting held on 21 June 1995 that United States participation in the United Nations was not driven by any starry-eyed commitments to multilateralism, but rather by a sober recognition of the usefulness of the United Nations as a vehicle for American leadership.

Let us recall that the American Administration takes pride in murdering the children of Iraq in the name of the Security Council.

In a television interview aired on CBS in 1996, the American Secretary of State was asked about reports that half a million Iraqi children had died, more than the number of people who died at Hiroshima. Was that too high a price to pay? Mrs. Albright said that she thought it was a very hard choice, but that it was worth it.

Those who believe that lifting sanctions is an unrealistic objective have to face the unassailable fact that the continuation of sanctions can only mean the continuation of the crime of genocide and that any cosmetic changes in the sanctions regime will not halt the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Iraq. There is no practical, legal or ethical alternative to the lifting of sanctions, none whatsoever.

The President: I thank the representative of Iraq for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Slovakia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Tomka (Slovakia): Mr. President, I wish to express the appreciation of my delegation for your convening of this second open debate on children and armed conflict taking place in the Security Council. The fact that you, Sir, as the Foreign Minister of Namibia, are presiding over this open debate attests to the importance of the topic.

Slovakia has aligned itself with the statement of the representative of Finland delivered on behalf of the European Union. Allow me now to make some additional comments.

The issue before us is a complex one and should be dealt with as an integral part of a comprehensive approach. It has ethical, political, military, legal, humanitarian and socio-economic aspects, all of equal importance.

Experts estimate that children are suffering from the effects of conflict and its aftermath in approximately 50 countries around the world. Today, up to 90 per cent of conflict casualties are civilians, and increasingly large numbers of these are children and women. Over the last decade in particular, the nature of conflicts has changed profoundly. Many of them have taken the form of intra-State factional violence, civil strife and ethnic clashes that have disastrous humanitarian implications. The involvement of irregular armed groups, militia, foreign mercenaries, criminals and other disparate groups that have little knowledge of or respect for the rules of international law makes the situation even more difficult. Moreover, there is often a problem of political control over the groups, with local commanders being answerable to no one but themselves. The deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance to civilians by the combatants is, in many cases, a major element of their military strategy. Civilian populations, and far too often children, are principal targets of war, and even its instruments. According to estimates, up to 300,000 children are directly involved in conflict around the world — as soldiers, porters and frequently as all-purpose slaves — in violation of international treaties. Children are conscripted or tricked into volunteering and sometimes sold to armies and guerrilla groups.

The international community must ensure that those who target children cannot do so with impunity. A major problem has been the failure of States to bring to justice those who violate international humanitarian law. The result has been the development of a culture of impunity in which flagrant violations of human rights and humanitarian law continually go unpunished. Importantly, the Security Council has for some time recognized that massive violations of humanitarian law can constitute a threat to peace and security.

There are several international treaties that make a very solid framework for the purpose of the protection of children in armed conflict. These include the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols to them and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We welcome the efforts to update the existing legal instruments and strengthen human rights standards, such as the one to raise the legal age for recruitment and participation in hostilities to 18 years through the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, the setting up of ad hoc Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and last year's decision to establish a permanent International Criminal Court have been other significant developments aiming at assuring the accountability of those who violate international law. Slovakia, as one of a group of like-minded countries, was advocating including in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court a provision making it a war crime to recruit children and involve them in hostilities.

At this juncture, we find very timely the issuance of the Secretary-General's guidelines for all personnel associated with United Nations mandated peacekeeping operations. The guidelines, which entered into force on

the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, 12 August 1999, are designed to ensure that all United Nations peacekeepers observe the norms of international humanitarian law. Paragraphs 7.4 and 8 (f) are especially relevant to the subject before us.

A legal instrument without an efficient mechanism of monitoring and enforcement gradually loses its normative impact. We concur with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, who, in her statement issued on the occasion of the recent fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, underscored that, rather than writing new laws, what is needed today is to implement those that already exist. Indeed, a lot has to be done in this respect. For example, although almost all States are parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, not all States have ratified or acceded to the Additional Protocols or to the basic international instruments on human rights and refugees. Only four States have ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court so far; another 56 ratifications are needed before the Statute enters into force.

Governments should not only be encouraged to ratify relevant international treaties and incorporate them into national law, they should also ensure the full implementation of commitments they have undertaken and bring to justice persons responsible for unlawfully recruiting children and for other serious breaches of the relevant laws. There should be a concerted effort made by Governments and relevant international and regional organizations, as well as by non-governmental organizations, to coerce non-State actors into compliance with international law, mainly through the principle of individual criminal responsibility.

The crucial factor contributing to a worldwide culture of violence and indiscriminate killing, as well as to putting guns into the hands of children, is a booming trade in small arms. The proliferation of these weapons has made it possible for very young children to be perpetrators of violence. Obviously, a number of conflicts in many places on our planet could not be long sustained without a continued flow of arms and ammunition. Governments, local warlords and rebel groups are spending enormous amounts of money for arms, thus impoverishing their own countries and depriving civil populations, including children, of basic needs. The Security Council should explore all ways and means available to ensure that an arms embargo, once established, is implemented effectively.

Since Africa is a continent suffering from far too many conflicts fed by arms transfers and trafficking in violation of sanctions imposed by the Security Council, we praise the efforts of the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 864 (1993) concerning the situation in Angola, Ambassador Fowler. His determined approach and recent trips to a number of African and European countries prove that sanctions committees should be actively engaged in ensuring the concerted efforts of all actors concerned — Governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, private companies and opinion leaders — in order to identify the sources of arms flows into zones of conflict and to cut off military forces and rebel groups from their resources and thus eliminate their ability to wage a war and violate international humanitarian law.

Moreover, economic sanctions should prevent war criminals from enjoying the fruits of their evil without harming innocent women and children. Well-targeted sanctions can have a real impact without necessarily leading to unbearable humanitarian consequences for the most vulnerable group of the population, the children. The ideas contained in the Secretary-General's report on Africa — of using individual-targeted sanctions against the perpetrators of abuses of human rights and humanitarian law, and of holding these people financially responsible to their victims — deserve full attention.

The issue before us has a very important socio-economic aspect since poverty facilitates the recruitment and participation of children in armed conflict. Children are sometimes even sold to armies and guerrilla groups by families thrown into poverty by ethnic conflicts. The Security Council, in mandating peacekeeping missions and designing peace-building programmes, should take into account the fragile nature of the issue and accommodate mandates to the specific circumstances of individual conflicts. Special attention should be paid to the programmes of demobilization and social reintegration of child combatants, their psychological recovery, the return of displaced and refugee children, and the restoration of access to health care, food and education. In this respect, I cannot but underline the role of relevant agencies, programmes and funds of the United Nations system, in coordination with activities of non-governmental and humanitarian organizations involved in this area.

The President: I thank the representative of Slovakia for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Afghanistan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): I congratulate you, Sir, on the manner in which you are presiding over the Security Council today. We are happy to see this meeting chaired by an eminent diplomat such as you. I congratulate your country, where I personally witnessed during a visit to Windhoek the efforts of your countrymen to work for the progress of Namibia, but with full awareness of belonging to the United Nations. We also thank Ambassador Andjaba for his very valuable efforts in the United Nations.

We were greatly impressed by the words of Ambassador Olara Otunnu, which reflected his highly credible work. He has performed his mission not only by visiting so many countries and travelling widely in many continents, but also by translating into action all of his heartfelt devotion to humanity.

I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the members of the Security Council and to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, who strongly condemned on Tuesday last week the forced displacement of civilians in Afghanistan as a result of the latest offensive by Pakistani-Taliban troops north of Kabul. He said he was concerned about reports that youngsters had been involved in the fighting. The Secretary-General also expressed deep concern over reports of the involvement of students, some as young as 14, and called for respect for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which bars the use of child soldiers.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has urged avoiding the recruitment of children under 18 years of age and getting them involved in warfare, as Louis-Georges Arsenault, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan, told a news conference. The United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, Mr. Broneck Szynolsky, has said there are some 30,000 to 40,000 displaced persons in Kabul. In addition, there are over 200,000 persons in northern Afghanistan newly displaced as a result of the latest massive offensive launched by the Taliban. Mr. Arsenault also said that over the past two weeks, the Taliban had visited *madrassas* — religious schools — in Pakistan and had succeeded in recruiting and sending away thousands of students.

As is now well known to the international community and to the States members of the Security Council, Afghanistan once again, since its establishment in 1992 as the Islamic State of Afghanistan, has been the victim of undeclared conflicts imposed by neighbouring countries, in this case Pakistan. The Pakistani objective remains to secure space — or, as characterized by its officials, "strategic depth" — through ensuring a subservient regime in Afghanistan. This design reminds us of the Nazi policy of *Lebensraum* in the 1940s, in which ethnic cleansing and genocide were widely practised. This continued conflict in our country, involving children, has inflicted on already war-stricken Afghanistan huge suffering for the Afghan people, widespread destruction, impoverishment and distress.

One of the disastrous dimensions of the conflict is the victimization of children. Various categories of children have been and continue to be affected by the armed conflict, such as child soldiers, displaced children, refugee children, unaccompanied minors, child victims of trafficking and sale, child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, children affected by ethnic cleansing policies, child survivors of massacres, orphaned children abandoned or separated from their families, children traumatized due to war, child beggars, child victims of landmines, and many others. Those categories of children are the legacy of war and conflict in Afghanistan. The emergence of Taliban in 1994 and their military campaign, organized and financed by Pakistani military intelligence, known as the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the involvement of Pakistani military personnel coupled with hundreds of Arabs and thousands of Pakistani extremists and so-called religious students from Pakistani schools, all of them armed, have created a new dimension in the conflict. Ethnic discrimination, religious intolerance and extremism are the main characteristics of the present conflict, which is abusively called a jihad, whereas a jihad of Muslims against Muslims is unheard of.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, in its previous statements before the Security Council over the past three years, has signalled the danger of the adventurous policy of Pakistan and the involvement in Afghanistan of its military personnel and members of its extremist organizations. This is a major threat to the peace and security of Central and South Asia. Despite the commitment given by Pakistan at the Tashkent meeting of the six-plus-two group on 19 July 1999, in which the participant countries agreed to put a halt to military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purposes, the Pakistani ISI directed and launched on 28 July a well-prepared all-out offensive attacking the civilian population of the Shamali

Plains. Despite the subsequent Pakistani-Taliban defeat, they barbarously pursued their planned widespread, systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing, genocide and a scorched-earth policy. The widespread use of cluster bombs; the levelling and torching of villages; the killing of hundreds of civilians, including women and children; the forced displacement of 40,000 women, elderly and children, in addition to 300,000 internally displaced persons; the separation of children from their families and the imprisonment of all male refugees in Kabul all present a new level of heinous crimes against humanity committed by the Pakistani-Taliban aggressors.

In spite of the abundant evidence of the Pakistani military presence in Afghanistan, including captured Pakistani fighters in our custody — I repeat, including captured Pakistani fighters in our custody — about which we will elaborate further in the forthcoming open debate of the Security Council, Pakistan continues to deny its well-known involvement in Afghanistan. However, due to the multiplicity of evidence, recently, after five years of war, Pakistani officials finally admitted to the presence of so-called "volunteers" from Pakistani religious schools in the fighting in Afghanistan. We have some of these "volunteers" in our custody, who have confessed to how they were recruited, trained and sent to Afghanistan in vehicles provided by the Pakistani ISI.

On 20 August 1999, the United Nations Information Centre reported from Islamabad how young students, some as young as 14, are being recruited for war in Afghanistan. Mr. Arsenault, the representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said that the Taliban delegation in Pakistan over the last two weeks appears to have recruited and sent between 2,000 and 2,500 fresh Taliban in expectation of a new offensive. The report adds that "a Taliban official recently told reporters that these students would be sent directly to the front lines". The Taliban have already admitted to the presence of Pakistanis in their ranks.

The recruitment of young students from religious schools is being pursued by the ISI, along with the dispatch of regular armed Pakistani personnel, to fight against the armed forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. This practice is advocated by some extremist religious organizations in Pakistan and, with the practical organization by the ISI of an effort of regimentation and indoctrination, is being deployed to justify and qualify this recruitment under the name of jihad or holy war. Fanaticism and bigotry are being inculcated in the fresh minds of these youngsters by the Pakistani military intelligence authorities to turn them into zealot fighters. Such acts are not in conformity with Islamic tenets. All this is done under the name of Islam. A holy struggle of Muslims against other Muslims has nothing holy in it and is a crime according to Islamic standards.

The *modus operandi* of Pakistan also goes against the recognized principles of international law, the United Nations Charter, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and even conventions signed and ratified by Pakistan. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, in article 38, stipulates that States Parties shall refrain from recruiting children into the army and that children shall not take part in hostilities.

Thousands of young students from Punjab and Sindh in Pakistan have been recruited publicly and their religious schools have been officially closed. Before entering Afghanistan, they have received cursory military training in Pakistan. They have then been sent to the front lines of Afghanistan. This fact has been increasingly and amply reported, even by Pakistani newspapers. The Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Afghanistan — including Security Council resolution 1214 (1998) of 8 December 1998 — have called on all States to take resolute measures to prohibit their military personnel from planning and participating in military operations in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, in accordance with the definition of aggression set out in article 3 (g) of General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) of 14 December 1974, the sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State is considered aggression.

On the basis of these documents, Pakistani responsibility for waging an aggressive war against Afghanistan and the dispatch of young *madrassa* students are well established. The determination of this aggression and the threat which it poses to the region and to international peace and security falls to the Security Council, along with its adoption of strong measures against aggression.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan firmly believes that wars have a tragic impact on civilians, especially children and women. We are of the view that the foreign-imposed Afghan crisis does not have a military solution. The foreign military and so-called "volunteers" and fighters should immediately leave Afghanistan. The Afghans

should resolve their problems through peaceful dialogue and negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations.

Afghan children are entitled to adequate health care, a decent education, nutritious food, a secure and loving family and a life of friendship and opportunity. We endorse the idea of a new peace and security agenda for children and women, ending the use of children as soldiers and providing better protection for children and women in conflict situations.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, as signatory to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reaffirms the fundamental place of the family in society and recognizes that the child should be brought up in the spirit of the ideals of the United Nations Charter, in particular peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom and equality. Gender equality must be maintained in all aspects, including the right to schooling. The child must not be raised in the spirit of bigotry, extremism and intolerance, as practised by the ISI and its affiliated organizations, including the Pakistani-backed Taliban.

Allow me in conclusion to share with the members of the Security Council information with regard to the forced enrolment and recruiting of children by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Our defence forces have captured 63 children, aged 13 to 16, who have been treated in a special way by being separated from the adults. Some of these children were recruited, but others were forced to participate in combat in the first row of the front lines as cannon fodder. Our side has contacted the senior family members and relatives of these children, and the captured fighters have been sent back to their families. I have here a list of their names, which I will forward to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In addition, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been informed of this matter.

The President: I thank the representative of Afghanistan for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Zambia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Kasanda (Zambia): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for this month of August. My delegation is also happy that you took the initiative to organize this meeting for the purpose of discussing the all- important subject of the protection of children in armed conflict.

On this occasion, as many delegations have noted, it is fitting to pay tribute to Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for his tireless crusade to save children from the scourge of war throughout the world. Today he presented a candid and graphic report on the prevalence of the acts of inhumanity being committed against women and particularly children in conflict situations throughout the world. It is my delegation's hope that the Council would pay special attention to Ambassador Otunnu's recommendations and suggestions aimed at improving the human condition of children.

As we meet here, we are united in the global outrage against the exploitation of children under age who serve as soldiers. This meeting is therefore an unequivocal expression of the international outrage against the unrelenting exploitation of children under arms, which has led to the growing consensus to raise the age limit to 18 years for serving in the military.

It is appalling that more than 300,000 children under 18 years of age are currently participating in the 50 or so armed conflicts that are under way worldwide. There are chilling reports of some guerrilla movements, in South Asia, fighting legitimate Governments using young girls as suicide bombers. There are equally chilling accounts in Africa, where more than 120,000 children under 18 years of age are being used as soldiers. These children are also subjected to other forms of cruelty, such as physical brutality, with girls suffering humiliation, exploitation and sexual abuse.

Again, all too often we get reports of poor children, perhaps without parents and without access to education, being lured into armed groups by promises of payment, food or protection. Some children are forcibly conscripted, but are told to say they volunteered. For all intents and purposes, the distinction between forced, compulsory and voluntary recruitment is blurred, hence the need to have a complete prohibition on child participation in combat altogether.

Zambia fully supports strengthening the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989. We strongly support the draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child relative to children in armed conflicts, which aims to raise the minimum age limit to 18 years for recruitment into the armed forces.

The time has come to stop the scourge of child soldiering, because all too often war becomes a permanent way of life for many children, some of whom are recruited at the tender age of seven years. In many of the world's protracted internal conflicts, such children go for years deprived of education or training in marketable skills. Hundreds of thousands of children under conflict conditions have become street children, traumatized and without hope for the future.

It is not surprising, therefore, that such children continue violent activities long after the original conflicts have ended. In a significant number of cases, the dividing line between warfare and outright banditry completely disappears.

My delegation applauds the International Labour Organization, which adopted on 17 June 1999 the Convention on the worst forms of child labour, intended to end the exploitation of the millions of children under the age of 18 who are involved in all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery. Such practices include the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, serfdom and prostitution.

Zambia believes that all recruitment of child soldiers must stop now. For the sake of all children the world over, we need a total ban on the use of child soldiers under 18 years of age.

The phenomenon of small and light weapons has introduced a new and disturbing dynamic in modern warfare. It has led to a vast expansion in the involvement of children under age as both victims and perpetrators. Handguns, rifles, machine guns, grenades and anti-personnel landmines are all weapons of choice in conflicts where children are used as both soldiers and perpetrators. Light arms are wreaking havoc on, and ruining the lives of, young children.

The issue of small and light arms should therefore be a matter of public concern, to the international community in general and to the Security Council in particular. We therefore urge the Council to take concrete steps to control the overflow of small and light weapons on the international scene.

In all war-torn countries the world over, the existence of international humanitarian law and human rights law has not led to a better life for ordinary innocent civilians, including children. There is absolutely no commitment whatsoever to such international norms. If anything, there is but mockery of these international standards by warlords and their supporters. This must stand as a challenge to the international community, and the Security Council should find more lasting and effective ways to hold culprits to account and to ensure that all concerned abide by their obligations under international law.

We call upon parties directly or indirectly involved in conflicts to respect existing international standards and to make every effort possible to protect children from violence. We reaffirm the fundamental principle that children must live out their childhood in peace, freedom and security, free from abuse, violence and exploitation.

The President: I thank the representative of Zambia for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Monaco. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, the delegation of Monaco is delighted to see you presiding over the Security Council during the month of August, and we warmly congratulate you. We are extremely grateful to you for having taken the initiative to place on the Council's agenda this important question of children and armed conflict. We also express sincerest thanks to Mr. Otunnu for his statement. He has displayed not only great competence but also great sensitivity of the individual appointed by the Secretary-General to be his Special Representative on this painful question.

The information that regularly reaches us on armed conflicts that now strike so many parts of the world is horrifying to us. It is all the more so since the moral rules of the law of war and humanitarian law seem less and less respected, paving the way for a brutal return to barbarity. It seems to the most careful and qualified observers that this twentieth century, which is coming to an end, has seen a slowing, but we hope not an end, to the advances of humankind and the hopes placed in its moral progress. The plight of a growing number of children involved in armed conflicts is in this respect very revealing of this phenomenon, whose causes are not always very precise or well determined. Indoctrinated, used as messengers, spies, combatants, unwilling torturers or, worse yet, in the grasp of threats or drugs, as human bombs, these children are no longer their own masters. They become for the belligerent parties, for the

warlords who are arrogant and totally unscrupulous, pliant instruments of the most ignoble violence.

The reports that the Secretary-General has presented to us recently — that of Mrs. Graça Machel in 1996, the expert he had appointed upon the invitation of the General Assembly to study the impact of armed conflict on children, and the more recent report of Mr. Olara Otunnu, his Special Representative — provide us with elements of information and reflection whose calibre and accuracy we wish to commend.

Among the thoughts put forward to explain the magnitude of this unacceptable phenomenon, some deserve special consideration. For example, we share without reservation the idea that there is a crisis in the values of civilization, whose causes are difficult to understand with certainty, but whose consequences worsen day by day not only for the communities concerned, but also undoubtedly for the societies of the future whose youth will not find ethical and moral foundations for their social behaviour.

All human societies have a tendency first and foremost to protect women and children not only because of their vulnerability, but because they consider them to be the source of their destiny. However, this traditional and very effective protection is tending to decline in proportions that are today alarming. It is true that because of external influences many societies are inexorably changing, and at the same time losing the moral terms of reference — without being able to replace them — that in many cases constituted the underpinnings of personal relations both within communities and among communities.

Consequently, a self-centred and selfish attitude often prevails over the general will, breaking down and undermining the very functioning of these communities and the human and social relations that bind them. The same applies to the frightful and frequently reported evidence of the development of violence in today's societies and, worse yet, the fact that violence has become so commonplace.

Many studies and research efforts have dealt with the causes of this violence. Their roots are numerous and varied: political, economic, social and even cultural. Poverty, exploitation, excessive inequalities and social upheaval, as well as changes of all types, which are sometimes overly rapid, are clear sources of destabilization and of conflicts. They encourage in particular the most immoral and unscrupulous power-hungry individuals whose desire for domination is unbridled to slake, with probable impunity, their ambitions, if not their perversions.

Technical progress and its consequences, particularly with regard to the characteristics and the nature of weapons that become increasingly deadly while being lighter and easier to handle, have also had an impact on the growing number of children involved in armed conflict. Children's relative weakness and their lack of experience and military training no longer constitute a serious handicap for the transport and the handling of today's weapons, in particular small arms.

Like the campaign against anti-personnel landmines that led to the Ottawa Convention, the convention in preparation against light weapons and small arms, of which children are also the first victims, should, we firmly hope, at least lead to stronger controls in order to reduce their use, if it is impossible to prohibit these weapons. These steps and all initiatives taken in this respect deserve to be seriously encouraged.

While the establishment of an international ethic and of a value system is a longstanding endeavour with constant advances and setbacks, it is nonetheless an endeavour that needs to be steady and conducted without discouragement. This is a guarantee for the future, and the Government of the Principality is deeply convinced of this.

We have just commemorated, on 12 August, the fiftieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions that constitute the basic instruments of international humanitarian law, but their provisions seem to be increasingly ignored. We note with dismay that present conflicts no longer take any account of the distinction between combatants and the civilian population and therefore children, as required in particular by the Fourth Geneva Convention and the 1977 additional protocols.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is also broadly and regularly violated, in particular the provisions of its article 38, but also those of its articles 19 and 34. The entire range of international instruments devoted to the protection of human rights is completely ignored and scorned in the armed conflicts of our day. To bridge the growing gap between existing international norms and their implementation and compliance with them must therefore be an absolute priority of the international community and of its institutions.

The optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child now under preparation, or the fact that the Statute of the International Criminal Court qualifies as a war crime the recruitment of children under

the age of 15 and their involvement in hostilities, are accomplishments and bear hope for the future, as long as, once these texts are enforced, we see to it that they are strictly implemented and as long as, when necessary, offenders are prosecuted. In fact, we in Monaco believe that the development and the strengthening of international norms for the protection of children should proceed even though the implementation of norms already adopted sometimes seems difficult and faces real obstacles.

Producing an awareness of the necessary and continued efforts for the social reintegration and physical and mental rehabilitation of children who are orphans, refugees, displaced, disabled for life, victims of or actors in armed conflict, with a view to improving their plight, also represents a major stage of considerable proportions. Education, professional training and attentive treatment and care are, in our view, indispensable if we are to shape and re-shape the children of war and make them full-fledged human beings for whom violence would not be the sole means of expression or the sole means of obtaining social recognition.

The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the item "Children and armed conflict", including resolution 48/157 dated 20 December 1993 and resolution 51/77 dated 12 December 1996, as well as the remarkable debate that the Security Council already devoted to this issue last year and which concluded with a presidential statement, have made it possible very substantially to deepen our knowledge and our thinking in this respect.

The Principality of Monaco, which has always shown special interest in children in difficult situations, is very sensitive to the situation of children both during and after hostilities. We have provided, within our means, through voluntary contributions, our support for the United Nations and have endeavoured to help the international non-governmental organizations that are dedicated to the protection of children, some of which have their headquarters in Monaco. For example, the Monaco authorities encourage the deployment of long-term educational, health and social programmes designed to improve the condition of children and, in particular, in the needy regions.

The Government of Monaco is completely determined to continue its efforts in this direction, aware as we are that the actions undertaken, however modest, are indispensable and that they must continue for many years after the end of fighting. We are also aware that, while it seems indispensable to protect children from armed conflicts and from their consequences, it is also vital to make preventive efforts to avoid the outbreak of these conflicts which bring tragedy and chaos in their wake.

The strengthening and the increase of the forms and methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes must therefore also be given the attention of the international community. Here, in the Security Council, whose main task is the constant quest for peace and security in the world, it is undoubtedly superfluous to recall this, but it may be less superfluous to underscore the importance of research in this field. Dispute and peace studies undertaken both from an academic and practical standpoint regarding the sources of conflict or the causes of violence represent steps which can undoubtedly contribute to overcoming the most formidable obstacles to the restoration and maintenance of peace in many regions.

Towards this end, the science of peace must go beyond conventional thinking. Mr. Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, certainly understands this concern, since for many years he presided brilliantly over the destiny of the International Academy for Peace, which succeeded the International Peace Institute founded in Monaco in 1903. The science of peace should in this context be viewed as an applied science aimed at preventing conflicts by analysing in depth, and on an ongoing basis, their origins and their development.

Wars, we believe, are not inevitable. They are in no way predetermined. They are, like famine or epidemics, the result of events that can be known, analysed and even controlled if we provide ourselves with the means to do so. Any knowledge acquired to combat war could therefore, in our view, be reflected not only in terms of action and negotiation but also, as is advocated in the report of Mr. Otunnu, in programmes to raise the awareness of world public opinion, whose moral weight and influence on political decision-making, are undeniable today.

The gravity and the magnitude of the question on the agenda of the Security Council this 25 August therefore completely justifies a public meeting which is addressed even beyond civil society to international opinion in the broadest sense of the term.

The President: I thank the representative of Monaco for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Ukraine. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Yel'Chenko (Ukraine): Mr. President, at the outset, let me join previous speakers in congratulating you on Namibia's timely initiative to convene today's open debate of the Security Council on this most important matter. The lengthy list of participants vividly demonstrates the acuteness of the agenda item before the Council. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Special Representative, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for his informative briefing earlier today and to extend Ukraine's strong support for his strenuous efforts in protecting children affected by armed conflict.

The phenomenon of participation of children in armed conflicts and hostilities is a very old one. It has been in existence since the human race began to wage wars. But it is most unfortunate that this phenomenon continues to exist, as do wars.

It is very clear that in the last resort the reason why children are suffering from being involved in armed conflicts is the conflicts themselves. In concentrating so far on this very simple fact, I do not mean to imply that the measures aimed at protection of children in armed conflicts are the palliatives.

I would like to stress, as has already been pointed out by a number of previous speakers, how important it is to realize that the present-day conflicts, even when they involve regular armed forces, are mostly of a civil, inter-ethnic or internal nature. So far, the main purpose of the warring sides is not to subdue the rival group but rather to exterminate or banish it. In this event, children are not simply collateral victims of atrocities committed by either side but are the direct target thereof. The same is true for involvement of children in fighting.

Undoubtedly, there is no single remedy to resolve the problem. However, in our opinion, the best solution would certainly be to eliminate altogether such internal warfare, as it constitutes the most significant cause of crimes against children in armed conflicts. But it is rather a long-term task of a general nature. What is important and, in principle, attainable for us today is, first, to create a universal mechanism which would effectively and inevitably penalize the perpetrators of crimes against children in armed conflicts. In this respect, I cannot help but mention a clear signal sent by the Diplomatic Conference in Rome that laid a firm foundation of a strong, effective and universal international criminal court, which would have jurisdiction over crimes against children, including the crime of conscripting or enlisting children into armed forces, as the most heinous war crime.

Secondly, we must seek to promote regional mechanisms and arrangements for the prompt and impartial investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for crimes against children. Thirdly, we need to establish a global "search and capture" system which would create conditions that would prevent the perpetrators from finding safe havens for themselves anywhere in the world.

It cannot be denied that the international community has always been, and remains, greatly concerned about this and has taken a number of steps in an effort to put an end to continuing child abuse in armed conflicts. International law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, its two Additional Protocols, the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognize the right of children to the necessary protection. In addition, various regional and national instruments provide specific protection for children in armed conflicts.

All these instruments constitute a sufficient legal basis for the adequate protection of the rights of children. They also enjoy the practically universal participation and support of States. Therefore, high international standards for the protection of children in armed conflicts have been set up. The main task now is to ensure their consistent implementation, and this task requires that greater efforts should be made jointly by Governments and the relevant international organizations.

At the previous meeting of the Security Council on this subject, last year, many constructive suggestions were made on how to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. We have also heard a number of very interesting practical proposals today. The delegation of Ukraine is particularly pleased that the Council is about to adopt, for the first time in its history, a draft resolution relating specifically to this matter. We consider its scope quite comprehensive. At the same time, allow me to emphasize several additional points.

In our opinion, the Security Council, as the organ primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security, could focus further on the roots of the

suffering of children in armed conflicts. There is also a need for the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies to work together in a more integrated fashion in order to shift the emphasis beyond humanitarian assistance and towards the areas of economic and social development. As we all know, the growing number of armed conflicts, as well as their brutal character, is to a large extent the result of poverty and decreasing resources that lead to extensive population migrations, unemployment and the growth of crime. Sometimes a mere spark can kindle the flame of long and bloody warfare, especially in areas with a population of mixed ethnic or religious composition. In this connection, it is important not to overlook the role of sustainable economic development, the preservation and strengthening of the fabric of societies, and education.

Another problem that requires urgent consideration is how to monitor and control arms flows into the areas where children are systematically brutalized and abused. Thus, the Security Council could take a more differentiated approach in recommending to the Member States specific actions in order to ensure the implementation of arms embargoes. I recently had an opportunity to submit to the Council consolidated information about the national policy and practice of Ukraine in this area. This information was circulated as a document of the Council, S/1999/706.

As to the economic sanctions imposed by the Security Council, my country strongly supports the idea that they must be used appropriately to target those responsible in order to prevent suffering by the most vulnerable part of the population: women and children.

The issue of the demobilization of all active soldiers younger than 18 years old also requires immediate attention. In this connection, we support the current efforts to promote the adoption, at the earliest possible date, of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ukraine is actively participating in the efforts aimed at preventing the victimization of children in armed conflicts all around the world and the rehabilitation of those who have suffered physically or mentally from the cruelties of war. On invitation from the Government of Ukraine, a group of children from Kosovo is currently housed in children's recreation areas in our country. With the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund, a special project to establish an international children's rehabilitation centre in Crimea, in southern Ukraine, is now under preparation and will be launched very soon.

Finally, we look forward to continued focus and follow-up by the Security Council on this important issue. Children have the right to life, to peace and to respect. Let us work together to help them.

The President: I thank the representative of Ukraine for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of South Africa. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): It would be a hopeless understatement for me and my delegation to say that we are pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over this crucial session of the Security Council. Rather, I choose to remember that it is granted to but a few individuals in each generation to have the honour to appear before their mentors and leaders so that they can measure how far their protégés have progressed in life. For many years in exile, I was among the privileged few who heard you teach, as you did so fervently, that the United Nations was, as it still is, capable and willing to act decisively at critical junctures of history when the situation so demands. I believe that this is the moment when this body must take a stand for the sake of future generations — that is, the children caught in vicious wars around the world.

It is for this reason that my delegation would like to express our appreciation to Namibia for having chosen to hold the second debate on the situation of children in armed conflict. We have two basic reasons to believe that this meeting could not have come at a better time. First, it is our hope that this important debate will underscore the continuing need for the promotion and protection of children affected by conflict. Secondly, we believe that this debate will help make sure that the Council continues to be seized of this matter.

During the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, in 1997, the United Nations adopted the first study and report commissioned by the United Nations on the situation of children in armed conflict. This work was headed up by our former first lady, Ms. Machel, with the help of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). For the first time, the international community collectively expressed profound concern that the situation of children around the world was untenable. Regrettably, since that historic report was released, more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 have been forced to fight in conflicts all over the world.

As we speak, more children continue to be dragged against their will into war. These abductions are accompanied by sexual abuse and cruel uses of children that defy description. Of even greater concern to us is the plight of the girl child. We continually receive disturbing reports that young girls are forced into sexual slavery and other practices that expose them to dreadful diseases such as HIV/AIDS. This must be stopped. Enough is enough.

In this regard, my Government supports the creation of zones of peace in situations where children are caught up in armed conflicts, with a view to protecting these children and to addressing their special needs. It is our firm belief that a global catastrophe of this magnitude requires the resolute will of the international community. We must implement comprehensive and preventive programmes and activities to arrest and eventually annihilate this problem.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is not only an affront to human values, it is also a fundamental impediment to socio-economic development. The social and economic challenges imposed on countries by this practice have frustrated, are frustrating and will continue to frustrate socio-economic development and social transformation.

My delegation would like to echo the decision adopted by the Durban summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, at which the heads of State or Government expressed their deep concern about the difficult situation of many children who are innocent victims of armed conflict. They condemned the recruitment, organization and employment of children in armed conflict. The Non-Aligned Movement summit further urged member countries to put a stop to the use of children as soldiers and to ensure their demobilization and reintegration into society.

Because more than 150,000 child soldiers are actively engaged in military combat all over Africa, African heads of State or Government adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in July 1990. The African Charter complements and builds upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Also in that Charter our heads of State or Government codified the responsibilities of the State, community and individuals in protecting the human rights of the child. This is the first regional treaty on the human rights of the child. We hope that more African States will soon ratify the Charter. We also call upon all regional intergovernmental bodies to emulate the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which has adopted the Charter.

Last July, African heads of State and Government, meeting at the OAU summit held in Algiers, reaffirmed their determination to work relentlessly for the promotion of the rights and welfare of the child. They recommitted themselves to combating all forms of child exploitation and, in particular, to putting an end to the phenomenon of the child soldier.

Prior to the Algiers summit, on 7 June 1999, the South African Minister of Defence announced that my own Government had taken a decision to amend its national defence policy to raise the age of enlistment into the South African armed forces from 17 to 18. Our policy now conforms with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which we signed on 10 October 1997.

It is worth noting that whilst the 1998 Security Council presidential statement on this subject was a welcome development, it was our contention then, and it still is our contention now, that a Security Council statement was inadequate. Today again we call on the Security Council to adopt an action-oriented and comprehensive draft resolution, such as the one before it right now, which is necessary to address the plight of children used as soldiers. If the Council were to fail to adopt such a draft resolution, it would face the risk of its inaction being misinterpreted as a lack of decisiveness in protecting children at this critical stage. We hope that in its deliberations the Council will reach the conclusion that on the eve of the next millennium it is time to take a stand against the abuse of children by those who wish to make war rather than peace.

South Africa would like to express its strong support for the mandate and the activities of the office of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. His will and resolve to tackle this issue in a forthright manner, by involving both State and non-State actors, enjoy our profound admiration and support.

We look forward with anticipation to the Security Council's first consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the recommendations made so far for the protection and welfare of children in situations of armed conflict. We believe that the report will guarantee that this august body remains seized of this important matter.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Mongolia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council on the agenda item entitled "Children and armed conflict".

I would like at the outset to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for initiating and organizing the follow-up to the open debate of the Council on this important issue, held in June 1998.

My delegation welcomed the Security Council's open debate on this issue as a means of drawing attention to the plight of children in conflict and post-conflict situations. It also welcomed the presidential statement adopted by the Security Council on this issue last year, strongly condemning the targeting of children in armed conflicts. The discussion that the Security Council is having today is both timely and necessary. It enables us to refocus our attention on this issue once again, bearing in mind past experience. It is hoped that, as a result of this discussion, the Council will adopt a strong, practical resolution and thus send the clear message from the international community that the protection of children affected by wars and conflicts is high on its agenda and that strong, effective domestic and international measures are needed to cope with this problem.

My delegation fully agrees with previous speakers that the protection of children in armed conflicts has become one of the most pressing human security and moral issues facing the world. Today it is the civilian population, in particular women and children, that is suffering most in armed conflicts. Millions of children are targeted in armed conflicts; they are abused, abducted, used in hostilities and killed. In some 50 countries, if not more, children are suffering, both physically and psychologically, from the impact of armed conflicts. It lies heavily on the conscience of the international community that it has allowed, during the last decade alone, two million children to be killed, over one million to be orphaned and six million to be seriously injured or permanently disabled. It has been estimated that in 1998, child soldiers numbered over 200,000; in a year, that figure increased to nearly 300,000. The report given to the Security Council last year by Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, his informative and thought-provoking statement this morning, and the seminal report of Ms. Graça Machel, the Secretary-General's expert on the question of impact of armed conflict on children, are most revealing and alarming. The plight of children in armed conflicts, unfortunately, has not changed for the better; if anything, it has worsened.

We believe that it is futile to talk about human security if we cannot ensure the protection of children in wartime or in armed conflicts, and the protection of their rights under international humanitarian law. We believe that without protecting its children, that is, its young, innocent and unprotected members, no society can be fair, stable or prosperous. All societies are morally bound to protect children and to create all the conditions necessary for their development, education and welfare. The State is called upon to play an important role. Simply said, the protection of children and the defenceless is the real yardstick for assessing a State's commitment to human rights and dignity.

The consideration in such an open debate, with the wide participation of Member States, of the negative impact of armed conflict on children is important not only for drawing the attention of the international community once again to this pressing question, but also for determining the adequate practical ways of combating such atrocities. In this regard, my delegation fully subscribes to the recommendations reflected in the five areas of engagement that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General outlined in his report to the Security Council back in 1998.

The United Nations can and must play an important role in the efforts to combat violations of international law where children are drawn into or otherwise affected by armed conflicts. That is why we support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as well as all other United Nations efforts in this regard. Their work should be continued and even reinforced.

In this context, my delegation favours the early adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. It is also my delegation's earnest hope that the working group of the Commission on Human Rights, drafting the optional protocol to the Convention, will soon finalize its work and submit the results to the General Assembly through the Commission. It is also our belief that a strong International Criminal Court (ICC) would play not only a positive role in prosecuting the perpetrators of such criminal acts, but a preventive role as well. Therefore, every effort should be made to

strengthen the ICC and make it operational as soon as possible.

The next century belongs to our children. It is therefore our responsibility to protect the young generation and to make their lives more secure and safe. In a broader context, the most efficient means of protecting children would be preventing conflict situations in the first place.

In this context, Mongolia attaches great importance to the preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping activities and peace-building measures of the United Nations, especially in the regions affected by armed conflicts. In this regard, the United Nations should properly address the various root causes of armed conflicts and find ways to prevent and avoid conflict situations.

Mongolia believes that the Security Council should not only strongly condemn the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, but also take concrete legal, political and other necessary steps to combat it. Therefore, we fully support the measures to be taken as reflected in the draft resolution on this question. Thus, the Security Council should unequivocally reaffirm its readiness to consider appropriate responses to cases in which children are specifically targeted and it should remain seized of the matter until there is considerable progress. We agree that, meanwhile, the Secretary-General should be asked to report on the situation in a year's time.

In conclusion, allow me to express my delegation's full support for organizing, when necessary, open debates on matters that affect international peace and security in general on issues that could be considered forms of preventive measures and diplomacy. The consideration of such issues involving the entire membership of the United Nations could benefit the Council not only by providing it with rich experience, but also by thus enlisting the real practical input and contributions of Member States.

The President: I thank the representative of Mongolia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Sudan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, may I offer you our heartfelt congratulations on the assumption of your brotherly country, a citadel of African liberalization, of the presidency of this Council. We are pleased to see you personally presiding over this meeting.

I also convey my thanks to your predecessor, the brotherly delegation of Malaysia, for its active presidency of the Council last month.

Allow me, too, to pay tribute to your delegation's initiative in calling and organizing this open debate, which reflects Namibia's concern for and interest in the search for viable solutions to the question of children and armed conflict, a matter of prime importance to the international community, Africa in particular.

I take this opportunity also to express our gratitude for the tireless efforts of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to raise awareness of the dimensions of this problem and for his constructive initiatives in this regard. We welcome his comprehensive report on the situation of children and armed conflict.

Armed conflicts continue to cause suffering, particularly among such vulnerable groups as children and women. The negative effects and long-term repercussions of these conflicts directly affect the viability of establishing an atmosphere conducive to peace and stability. We remain firmly convinced that the ultimate solution to this suffering lies in addressing the root causes of these conflicts, be they racial, economic or developmental, not to mention those with foreign dimensions. This approach is the only way to avoid the scourge of such conflicts.

My delegation deems it imperative to devote adequate attention to children in such conditions. We must make every effort to put an end to these conflicts and ensure the reintegration into society of those affected by war — children in particular. It is also necessary to rebuild and rehabilitate the infrastructure of conflict regions once peace has been achieved.

In addition, the ministerial meeting of the Organization of African Unity — held in my capital, Khartoum, in December last year — and the resulting recommendations on internally displaced persons, in particular women and children, are evidence of the OAU's interest in this very important question, which directly affects the entire continent of Africa.

My delegation would like to inform the Council of the efforts deployed by my country's Government regarding the question of children and armed conflict. My country has devoted particular attention to this question, as evidenced in its ongoing efforts to find a

comprehensive and lasting solution to the war in southern Sudan.

My Government has granted the right of self-determination to southern Sudan. It has cooperated fully with the United Nations in order to facilitate access by the affected groups to humanitarian assistance. Its efforts are reflected in the many initiatives it has taken to put an end to the conflict, the most recent of which was its decision last month to call for a nationwide ceasefire.

I should like to state here before all present that my Government is fully prepared to negotiate a permanent ceasefire with a view to reaching a lasting solution to the question of southern Sudan. In addition, it has made considerable efforts to establish peace and stability in war-affected regions. It has also urged the international community further to pressure the rebel factions to come to the negotiating table and enter into a serious dialogue.

My country has cooperated fully with all relevant United Nations bodies concerning the question of children. Both this year and in 1998, my country received the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. It welcomed his mission at the highest level and took the necessary practical measures to facilitate the discharge of his lofty mandate.

I should like in this respect to state that my Government reaffirms its full and principled commitment not to recruit children under the age of 18 into military service and has enacted national legislation to this effect. It has also abided by international instruments on the rights of the child.

My Government has fulfilled its promise to allow the United Nations mission to carry out a survey last June in the Nuba Mountain region to assess humanitarian needs in that area. It provided the mission with everything it required to do its work. My Government has cooperated with the relevant United Nations agencies, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in finding and releasing children abducted by opposition forces in a neighbouring country and in returning them to their families. A number of these children have been released, three of them during the Special Representative's visit to the Sudan last year.

We listened with great interest to the statement made this morning by the representative of the United States on her Government's resolve to alleviate the suffering of children in Africa. We fully appreciate that sentiment, and we hope that the representative will translate her words into action. She should acknowledge that her Government made a mistake in bombing the Al-Shifa factory in the Sudan.

Last week, on a very sad occasion, many Sudanese citizens gathered before the ruins of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory to mark the one-year anniversary of the American aggression against that factory. Indeed, a full year has elapsed since the United States of America committed its act of aggression against the Al-Shifa factory in my country. We continue on a daily basis to receive relevant information. The whole world knows that this act of aggression was the result not only of erroneous information and intelligence but of a lack of vision. We would have expected a super-Power such as the United States of America to set an example of humanity and respect for rights, an example of justice and fairness; to acknowledge the mistake it had made; and to compensate the children of the Sudan for depriving them of the source of 70 per cent of the medication they need to prevent illnesses, and of 100 per cent of medication for animals, who provide meat and milk.

We would like to reiterate once again that my Government will continue to cooperate with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in his effort to deal with the problem of children and armed conflict. In this respect, we find it necessary to tackle this question in a transparent manner and to give it the attention it deserves. We must avoid falling into the trap of concentrating on one region and neglecting others.

All of this is of prime importance for my country. As a matter of fact, for years the rebel movement in southern Sudan has been abducting large numbers of innocent children, enlisting them forcibly in its ranks as soldiers and preventing them from returning to their families. These practices have been known to the International Committee of the Red Cross for years and years but the international community did not condemn or deplore them.

My delegation supports the efforts undertaken by the Special Representative aimed at supporting and enhancing the cultural heritage and the special norms and values of local societies and protecting them against deterioration and disappearance, because these values are vital in educating the new generations.

We would like to mention with appreciation the study undertaken by Ms. Graça Machel on the impact of conflicts on children. My delegation finds that it is necessary to provide the necessary support to the Special Representative in his mission and in his continued efforts to raise awareness concerning this dangerous problem.

My delegation has read the draft resolution submitted by Namibia on children and armed conflict. We appreciate the interest of Security Council members on this question, but we urge them once again to make further practical efforts to put an end to the suffering of children in armed conflict, in full coordination with United Nations Members and its agencies and specialized organs.

The President: I thank the representative of the Sudan for his kind words addressed to my country and myself.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Kenya. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Odera (Kenya): Mr. President, Kenya warmly applauds the presence of a great son of Africa here today. Your country's courageous struggle for freedom, which you actively reinforced here in the United Nations as the South West Africa People's Organization's representative is well known. We are therefore delighted to see you preside over a discussion which we hope can contribute towards the freedom of children from participation in armed conflict.

Allow me to join other delegations in thanking you for taking the initiative to convene this debate on a subject with which, alas, we are all too familiar in our continent. I also wish to express my delegation's deep appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, not only in familiarizing himself first-hand with the situation of these special children, but also in trying to publicize their plight to the world at large, logistical and administrative constraints notwithstanding. We encourage Mr. Otunnu and his team to continue their good work.

I recall that a little over a year ago, in a similar debate, delegation after delegation expressed outrage at the sheer numbers involved and the extent of the atrocities in situations of conflict, where children were the primary victims. Unfortunately, despite widespread condemnation of the senseless targeting of innocent children in armed conflicts, the international community is still witnessing repeated accounts of such horrors in many parts of the world. We also know that for every child whose life is brutalized, there is a likelihood that unless dramatic changes occur for the better, that child will in turn one day abuse or attack another vulnerable human being. A vicious cycle of violence is created, which leads to the type of revenge attacks and massacres which have sadly become a common feature of our news broadcasts and newspaper columns.

The media have helped highlight unspeakable crimes which are committed against the voiceless — against children in armed conflict. Who has not tried to blot out the image of raped, maimed or malnourished victims from their minds? Most often, they are victims who have been robbed of their childhood. Having been robbed of that precious gift which we take for granted in times of peace, how do we reintegrate them into society? How do we help heal not only the physical wounds of chopped limbs, but also the emotional ones of violent sexual crimes? How, indeed, do we restore their confidence in humanity when that humanity itself is absent?

Only decisive action can arrest this pattern and cycle of violence. The Security Council has the capacity to take a lead not only in preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, but also in ensuring the protection of their rights as children. In fact, since the Security Council's presidential statement on the involvement of children in armed conflict was issued on 29 June 1998, some progress has been made in defining elements of crimes under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, including crimes which affect children in armed conflict situations. My delegation considers this a positive development intended to reaffirm the obligation of Member States to prosecute those responsible for grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

Increasingly, we need to look beyond disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers. We need to consider how to establish and encourage training and capacity-building in trauma counselling and rehabilitation at local levels for those who deal with children in post-conflict situations. We must be able to assess and address the impact of the emotional damage resulting from the violation of children's rights. To paraphrase a nursery rhyme, let me add that Humpty Dumpty has had a great fall, but we must put him together again. A holistic, integrated, action-oriented approach which combines the elements of social policy, political will and economic and financial commitment is one way the international

community can make a positive difference in dealing with this complex problem.

Finally, it is well known that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So unless we support the initiatives and activities of the Special Representative as he continues to work closely with the relevant programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations system, our best intentions will not translate into action. In this regard, every effort needs to be made to mobilize adequate funds to support his efforts on behalf of this special category of children. On our part, we will continue to lend all the support we can, especially in the context of the group of Friends. For which of us, when asked for a fish, would offer a child a serpent? Let us give them fish to eat. We owe it to them.

The President: I thank the representative of Kenya for her kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Egypt. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) *(spoke in Arabic)*: At the outset, I would like to express my country's profound appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to your fraternal country for presiding over this meeting of the Security Council.

I would also like to welcome, thank and pay tribute to Mr. Olara Otunnu for his tireless efforts and his valuable contributions to strengthening the rights of children in armed conflicts.

I would also like to reaffirm my country's full commitment to support all the efforts made in this area.

The physical, intellectual, spiritual and mental development of children must receive attention as a social and economic need for all of the countries of the world and for their cultures and civilizations, whatever the state of their economic and scientific development.

The successful outcome of the World Summit for Children in 1990 set ambitious goals for children and their development. To date, 181 States have ratified the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is the best proof of the international community's commitment to protecting the rights of the child, as well as of its capacity and willingness to work seriously to promote and protect those rights and children's dignity.

However, despite the major achievements made in the course of this decade, a number of factors have had a negative impact on children in many regions of the world. These include the economic crisis, the growing debt burden, illnesses and epidemics. Perhaps among the most dangerous factors has been the spread in the last few years of armed conflicts, which have undergone radical changes that have altered their very nature. The flouting and rejection of international law, particularly international humanitarian law, have opened up the way to all kinds of suffering being inflicted upon civilian populations, and have also worsened the problems of children in regions of armed conflict despite international efforts aimed at preventing the recruitment of children into armed forces and calling for child soldiers to be demobilized, reunited with their families, protected against organized violence, and rehabilitated and reintegrated fully into society.

Before going further into the issue before us, I should first like to reaffirm Egypt's firm position, which we set out before the Council in February, regarding the need to consider the protection of children in armed conflicts in a broader context, namely, that of the protection of all civilians. Pending the report of the Secretary-General on the question of the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts, which he was requested to prepare following the meeting of the Council on that subject, we would like to stress the points we believe should be taken into account when the Council considers humanitarian questions.

First, the Council must consider these questions in the context of complete respect for the delicate balance between the principal organs established by the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the essential role of the General Assembly and the other bodies both within and outside the United Nations, whether governmental or non-governmental, for which the protection of civilian populations is the first priority.

Secondly, it is important for the Council to assume its role in finding solutions to conflicts threatening international peace and security. It must resolve such conflicts comprehensively by addressing their root causes in order to avoid the intensification of aggression between parties or disastrous humanitarian situations, such as the displacement or expulsion of citizens who then must seek refuge in neighbouring countries, thereby undermining the security of civilians, including children, and leading to an endless vicious circle.

Thirdly, the implementation of international humanitarian law should not be in contradiction with the need to respect the implementation of the provisions of the Charter. We welcome and support the fact that the Council is ready to respond in cases where civilians are used as targets, or when humanitarian assistance is deliberately hindered, but solely within the context of Chapter VII, Article 39, of the Charter. However, if the Council is unable to exercise its responsibilities, resort should be made to the General Assembly's "Uniting for Peace" resolution.

We the peoples of the world, as stated in the Charter, are determined to protect future generations from the scourge of war. Unfortunately, we have failed catastrophically. As stressed in Mr. Otunnu's report to the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, wars are still killing millions of children worldwide. They are either the targets of or tools for these wars. They are suffering in more than 50 countries from conflicts and the aftermaths of those conflicts. Despite the large number of children killed, abducted, taken hostage or mutilated by anti-personnel landmines, the number of those who have been deprived of their physical, mental and emotional needs in societies controlled by war is much greater. Indeed, millions have lost their families and homes, not to mention their school years and youth. Many children have suffered permanent psychological damage due to the experiences they have suffered.

While human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other conventions on international humanitarian law — particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977 — already represent important milestones along the road to the protection of children in armed conflicts, the gap between these norms and their implementation and practice is vast and growing at an unprecedented rate. Despite our conviction that the main responsibility for bridging this gap and implementing international norms to protect children during war falls first of all to government, we are also convinced that international society has an important role to play in providing the material and technical assistance necessary to protect and rehabilitate children. We appeal to the international community to make every effort to ensure the commitment of all parties to conflicts to protect the rights of children against exploitation, abuse, violence, rape, displacement and death.

We must put an end to the impunity of those who use children as targets. The Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in Rome last year, could be an important development in the area of the protection of children in armed conflicts since the Statute describes the recruitment of children and their use in these conflicts, be they internal or international, as a war crime.

Every effort must be made to adopt the optional protocol relating to the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Reaching an agreement on a mandatory age for recruitment will be a major achievement benefiting succeeding generations in all the States of the world.

We must also undertake to impose conditions on the transfer of weapons, particularly of small arms, to regions of conflict. We must also coordinate and mobilize humanitarian assistance and meet all children's needs — *inter alia*, for health care, education, social services — throughout the post-conflict period, so as to replace the culture of violence in which these children have grown up with a culture of peace and development.

Children are the future of civilization and the future of all societies. Their development, their protection and their rights are a common responsibility for us all. Fulfilling this responsibility will yield fruits for future generations. The choice is war and violence or peace and development.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Indonesia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Pohan (Indonesia): At the outset, my delegation would like to extend its sincere congratulations to you, Mr. Minister, on your delegation's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August. We have every confidence that under your wise and able guidance the issues before the Council will be brought to a successful conclusion.

Allow me also to extend felicitations to your predecessor, Ambassador Hasmy Agam, Permanent Representative of Malaysia, for his skilful stewardship of the Council's activities last month.

My delegation welcomes the initiative to hold open debates on several crucial issues in the Security Council in the past few years, including today's open debate on

the agenda item entitled "Children and armed conflict". We believe that such practices eventually lead to new, realistic and pragmatic ideas and approaches for overcoming and resolving the issues facing us. In this regard, my delegation is looking forward to other important and strategic issues being debated in the Security Council, in order to transform it into a more transparent, democratic and accountable Security Council, especially as regards issues relating to the maintenance of international peace and security.

In this century, the situation of children in many parts of the world remains critical as a result of armed conflicts. As this problem continues to tear at the conscience of mankind, we must be determined to meet the challenge and overcome the problem. We share the concern at its harmful, widespread and long-term consequences for durable peace, security and development.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to recall the observation made by Mrs. Nafsiah Mboi, an Indonesian expert, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child during the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, held last July. She said that the use of children in armed conflict was an extreme example of global acceptance of the violation of the rights of children, and it could no longer be tolerated.

Children are involved in armed conflicts basically in two ways: one, as instruments of warfare; and the other, as victims of armed conflict.

In the first instance, as was rightly pointed out by Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in his report contained in document A/53/482, children simply should have no role in warfare. Children whose minds are just beginning to take form are being used as tools for warfare, and many if not all of these children are not fully aware of the reasons and objectives of the armed conflict they are participating in.

It is appalling to note that an alarming trend in recent years is the increasing participation, both directly and indirectly, of children in armed conflict. It is estimated that currently more than 300,000 children are serving as soldiers in conflicts in some part of the world.

The link of children to violence, especially in areas affected by conflict, is largely due to the accessibility of small arms. The international community has taken the right track in endeavouring to institute controls on the transfer of illicit arms, especially in zones prone to conflicts. But much needs to be done.

Indonesia notes the efforts by many delegations, and also by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, to raise the legal age for recruitment and participation in hostilities through the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Efforts in other domains — such as addressing the need to eradicate the political and socio-economic conditions that often facilitate the recruitment and participation of children in armed conflict, and an effective response to the needs of child combatants in post-conflict situations — also warrant our serious consideration.

As regards the second instance, millions of children have already become victims of armed struggles in which they have either taken part or merely become victims. While we take note of these facts, we cannot ignore the physical and psychological trauma. Millions of children have lost parts of their bodies, mostly as a result of mines, while many have lost their homes, parents and possibly their dignity. All in all, many children have lost years of education, youth and a normal life.

It is widely recognized that a sustained programme of assistance in a post-conflict peace-building period is critically important in order to consolidate peace and to support rehabilitation capacities. A crucial element of such an approach is focusing on the needs of children — of those who are being used as instruments of an armed conflict and of those who are victims of such conflict.

A narrow approach to this issue could not effectively address the magnitude of the situation. A holistic approach is therefore needed, while maintaining the unique characteristics of each and every culture and society. In this light, the sources of conflict should be immediately focused on. It is worthy to note that the nature and scope of conflict in recent times have changed qualitatively. More and more armed conflicts are internal in nature, taking place within existing State boundaries. In these conflicts civilian victims — mainly women and children — are now estimated to make up 90 per cent of the casualties. A broadly accepted generic approach to addressing and overcoming the situation has now become imperative. Such an approach should be based on principles that have enjoyed wide international support, including those that govern relations between States.

In our view, any approach under consideration should incorporate aspects relating to children in armed conflict in various crucial fields such as peacekeeping, peace-building and humanitarian aid and assistance. Furthermore, we believe that the situation of children would be better addressed through the establishment and implementation of peace agreements and relief, protection and socio-economic measures. Such approaches and measures cannot be carried out by Governments experiencing armed conflict acting alone; rather, concerted, systematic and organized efforts are needed from all actors in the regional and international community, including the United Nations system, and even from private citizens. In this regard, Indonesia welcomes the work done by the Special Representative in spearheading efforts to combine legal, political and humanitarian strategies to promote the rehabilitation of children, at the same time preventing their involvement in future conflicts.

The future of human civilization and the future of every individual society without doubt depend on children. To use children in an armed conflict is to cast a shadow on their future, for children who are exposed to violence tend to carry in their hearts and minds fears and hatreds that have long-term effects. Because of the sheer number of children involved and victimized in armed conflicts around the world, the future is at stake, especially where adequate educational opportunities to prepare them for careers and counselling to help them overcome the trauma of hostilities are limited. It is self-evident that much needs to be done to alleviate their suffering and to ensure them a rightful place in their societies through adequate support programmes. The international community could face a potentially serious situation in the event that we fail to take timely and adequate steps to deal with this problem.

Momentum to begin the process of rectifying the situation, especially in its legal aspects, was evident this year at the time of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It ought to have been possible then to adopt the draft optional protocols, in this case the one on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. However, to the dismay and disappointment of many Member States, they were not adopted.

We hope that today's debate will reach a satisfactory conclusion with the adoption of a draft resolution addressing the need to deal with the serious concerns on children in armed conflict.

By way of conclusion, we would like to emphasize that children are indeed our future. And for that reason, children and their rights have been and will always be a top priority in Indonesia's development policies. Those policies are formulated on the premise that children's welfare is the foundation of the well-being of a nation.

The President: I thank the representative of Indonesia for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Angola. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Coelho Da Cruz (Angola): Allow me first of all to express our profound appreciation to Namibia, a friendly neighbouring country, for having chosen to hold a second debate on the situation of children in armed conflict. We are sure, Sir, that under your leadership today's debate will have a successful outcome.

Although the topic under discussion is a sad one, it is with great pleasure that Angola is participating in this debate. We hope that with our modest input we can shed some light on the issue of children and armed conflict and help find a solution that will bring about sustainable relief of the situation, something which the international community has been expecting for a long time.

We praise the efforts made so far by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of Ms. Graça Machel's report. The Republic of Angola reiterates its willingness to cooperate with Mr. Olara Otunnu in every way that is necessary.

As members certainly know, Angola is one of the many countries that has been facing this kind of problem for several years. Efforts made by the Government to protect the children caught in this vicious circle and to alleviate their suffering have been consistently hindered by the actions of armed bandits who continue to pursue the war as a means of reaching their goals.

As Ms. Machel pointed out in her report, armed conflicts without any doubt affect major developmental factors in children, particularly physical, mental and emotional factors. Aware of this reality, the Angolan Government, in spite of the other challenges it faces, has spared no effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutions that provide assistance to children as well as to war victims in general. Every year the Government allocates a special budget for social development and reintegration services and for the

Children's National Institute to support specific projects related to the placement of war orphans with members of their own families; building shelters and temporary lodging facilities to shelter those children whose families may take longer to find; building schools and health centres in areas created for the temporary accommodation of displaced people; providing food safety; providing funds for the national non-governmental organizations that care for those child victims of the war who suffer from trauma and other psychological problems; manufacturing prosthetic limbs; and sending child victims of anti-personnel landmines and other explosives to other countries for treatment, in cooperation with international non-governmental organizations.

The National Children's Institute was established in 1994 specifically to address the problems of the protection of children and their integration into Angolan society. This institution has headquarters in Luanda and offices throughout the country. With the support of various United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, the Institute, together with a number of national and international non-governmental organizations, has carried out an effective, sustained effort to collect data and identify and resettle Angolan child victims of the war, specifically war orphans and street children. To date, approximately 30,000 children have been received in appropriate centres; more than half of them have been sent back to live with their relatives.

Unfortunately, owing to the lack of appropriate resources, this Government effort is far from meeting the projected needs. We recognize the valuable support given by the United Nations agencies I have mentioned and by the international community, but the difficult new situation that our country is facing has had an impact on its priorities, and some projects that had already seen considerable progress have suffered setbacks returning them to the level of the earliest stages.

We refer, for instance, to the area of landmine clearance. Mines have caused so many victims among defenceless women and children. In 1997, the national agency in charge of the removal of anti-personnel landmines and other explosives reported that about 20 per cent of all landmines estimated to exist throughout the country had been cleared. Today, we would not be in error to say that the same number of mines have been laid again.

These and other national issues, plus the recommendations of the Machel report, make our Government think, and make it reiterate its determination, whenever possible, not to wait for peace to come to resume its development efforts. The ongoing implementation of the programme of stabilization and economic recovery for the three-year period 1998 to 2000, endorsed by the International Monetary Fund, is an example of this.

The Government of Angola fully subscribes to the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, as well as to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which set out principles and standards for the protection and empowerment of children. Nevertheless, as some delegations have already stated, the situation of children affected by armed conflicts has many important aspects and it would be too ambitious to try to address all of them extensively in today's debate.

Currently, the problem of children and armed conflict is deteriorating as the increasingly serious humanitarian crisis reaches tragic proportions. In this context, we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the multifaceted aid we have received so far from the United Nations agencies and from a number of friendly countries which, although insufficient, has helped meet the needs of those communities that have fallen victim to the war.

We hope that, in view of the latest appeals made by our Government and by the United Nations system, contributions to the 1999 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Angola can be increased as quickly as possible, financially and in kind, in order to enable the agencies to address effectively the plight of internally displaced persons, children in particular.

Let me conclude by expressing the support of my delegation for the draft resolution to be adopted at the end of this meeting as a commitment of the international community to assisting the cause of the children around the world affected by armed conflict.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): My delegation is pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over

this open debate on children and armed conflict. We commend the Namibian initiative in holding this debate, open to the participation of all States Members of the Organization. To you, Mr. Minister, and members of your delegation, we extend sincere congratulations.

At the outset, permit me to express the appreciation of my delegation for the opportunity accorded to us to address the Security Council in this important debate on children and armed conflict. This debate, which comes in the wake of a similar one held in the Council on 29 June 1998, is most welcome by my delegation.

As we meet today, some positive developments are happening in Africa. The agreement in Sierra Leone and the prospects for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo require forward planning for the reintegration of children in society. It is our hope that the Council will adopt a strong resolution that will seriously address the problem in all its manifestations.

Tanzania has had the unfortunate experience of being a first-hand witness to the plight of children fleeing from situations of armed conflict in neighbouring countries. Nothing is so heart-wrenching as the doleful looks of the innocent children who do not understand why they have been uprooted from a life that they knew to strange and unfamiliar surroundings. It is unfortunate that, in today's international relations, the change in the nature and scope of conflict has invariably drawn children, who are least responsible for the conflicts, into the power struggles of the adversaries. Nothing is so sad as a child whose only purpose in life is to live to avenge the death of a parent or relative. The Council needs to address this problem squarely by sending an unequivocal message that the use and abuse of children will not be tolerated or condoned under any circumstances. It is time for those responsible for such abuses to be held responsible for their actions.

We have read the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, and we cannot but commend him for his eloquence in sensitizing the international community to the plight of children who have been victimized by armed conflict. The priorities and recommendations identified in the report call for serious attention and necessary action. Indeed, it is with a sense of gratification that we recognize the efforts that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is making in giving the matter of children and armed conflict the high profile that it correctly deserves.

In his report to the Security Council in April 1998 on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, the Secretary-General of the United Nations pointed out that

> "poor economic performance or inequitable development have resulted in a near permanent economic crisis for some States, greatly exacerbating internal tensions and greatly diminishing their capacity to respond to those tensions". (*A/52/871, para. 79*)

The alleviation of poverty should therefore be a common concern as a necessary step towards ending conflicts and protecting the rights of our children.

Statements made in the Council today have further recognized the important work being done by Ambassador Otunnu. That recognition needs to be elevated to tangible action by giving him the requisite support — financial, human and material — to enable him to fulfil the mandate he has been entrusted with. The situation is urgent and actions of the Council will have a very important bearing on the way the problem is tackled. In stressing the need to properly equip the special unit, we are not unmindful of the critical roles played by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to mention but a few, and the community of non-governmental organizations in that area. What is crucial now is to intensify the cooperative efforts of the various players. It is a huge undertaking with multiple requirements that cannot be handled by a single entity.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Uganda. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Beyendeza (Uganda): My delegation is pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over this Council and this debate. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate, which touches on matters of particular importance to my country. This debate was long overdue, particularly for my country, which, since 1986, has witnessed up to 10,000 children abducted by terrorist forces, namely, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operating in the northern part of Uganda and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which operate in the western part of the country.

Uganda's record on its commitment to human rights is well known. Uganda is an original signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is also a party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Uganda is therefore fully committed to the implementation of the letter and spirit of these conventions.

The children of Uganda are the future of our society. Their welfare, upbringing, protection and security are of the utmost importance and priority to the Government and people of Uganda. Nothing could therefore be more painful for Uganda than the systematic abduction, torture, detention, enslavement, mutilation and killing of these innocent children. This is precisely what has been happening for 12 long years in northern and now western Uganda.

Let me give you a few statistics to illustrate the gravity and the horror of this problem in my country. In October 1996, 139 schoolgirls from Aboke Secondary School were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army; to date, the majority are still missing. In June 1998, another gruesome attack was made on Kichwamba Technical School in western Uganda by the ADF in which over 80 students were burnt to death and 100 abducted. These are only two examples of the systematic abuses wrought on our children continuously since 1986.

These terrorist groups ambush communities, often targeting women and children, the most defenceless members of society. They target young children between 11 to 16 years, but at times they abduct younger ones of 5 to 9 years, often dragging them away after massacring their parents and relatives. As a result, fear and uncertainty have become permanent features of life in northern and western Uganda. The Secretary-General has already documented this situation in his report, and of course the Security Council has been seized of these matters for some time now. In fact, in 1997 our Prime Minister personally briefed the members of the Council on these abominable acts.

I would have liked to catalogue the extremely painful experiences these children go through — if they make it — but I feel restrained by the need for brevity. Suffice it to request the Council to at least begin to act in concrete ways that demonstrate the resolve to put to an end so much suffering borne by innocent children. Let us not ignore the yearning of so many little children for a fuller and more meaningful life. Let us demonstrate that the Council and the United Nations are concerned and will act to protect these children.

What the rebels have done and continue to do with impunity in Uganda is alien to African culture, to our traditional values and way of life. It is a unique and exceptional situation which demands extraordinary action. In our view, these violations against children should be classified as crimes against humanity.

To date two important resolutions on children have been adopted by the Commission on Human Rights, but they have not been translated into freedom for the children affected by armed conflict. We therefore call on the international community to fully implement the provisions of those resolutions.

Uganda will continue to call on the international community to exert pressure on the Lord's Resistance Army and the Allied Democratic Forces to stop the abduction, killing, torture and sexual abuse of children and women, and to release unconditionally all the children under their control; to condemn the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army and the Allied Democratic Forces as being crimes against humanity; and to exert pressure, including the imposition of embargoes if necessary, on all those who sponsor and support these terrorist groups.

Uganda supports the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We request that adequate resources be made available to the Office for the implementation of its mandate. The Ugandan Government has extended an invitation to the Special Representative to visit the affected areas in northern and western Uganda. I should like to take this opportunity to renew the invitation and to express the hope that he will find time in his busy schedule to undertake an official visit to Uganda in the near future.

The Ugandan Government, for its part, will continue to protect all its citizens, especially children and women, from abduction; ensure that all children receive prompt and adequate access to medication and counselling while in Government custody; release children as promptly as possible to their families or appropriate child-welfare organizations for speedy reintegration into their communities; and further ensure full compliance by Government soldiers with international human rights standards.

We will continue to count on the support of the international community and non-governmental organizations to ensure that displaced people and those

temporarily living in protected areas have adequate food, water and medication. Finally, we will initiate a widespread awareness campaign to inform and educate communities about the special needs of children who have been abducted or otherwise affected by armed conflict.

In June last year, the Security Council held an open debate on the same issues. On that occasion, the Council issued a presidential statement. It is our hope that this year will not be business as usual, but that the Council will send a clear message to the international community and to those who are responsible for these crimes against children in armed conflict that the Council is resolved to strongly address the predicament of these children, whatever the causes of such conflicts.

The President: I thank the representative of Uganda for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Mozambique. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Gouveia (Mozambique): I would like to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for the excellent manner in which you are conducting the affairs of the Council. Allow me to pay a special tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hasmy Agam of Malaysia, for the excellent work he did during the month of July. My delegation would like also to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Organization of African Unity.

We strongly commend your initiative, Mr. President, of introducing today's topic into the agenda of the Council and salute the members of the Security Council for agreeing to give this issue the priority it deserves.

The importance that the Government of Mozambique attaches to the issue of children and armed conflict is based upon the long experience of years of war of destabilization. This dark page of my country's history resulted in the loss of life of many Mozambicans, the destruction of economic and social infrastructure, the disruption of the social fabric and the creation of groups of poorest among the poor, consisting of displaced persons and refugees, most of whom were women, children and the elderly.

The Rome Peace Agreement resulted from the genuine willingness of the Mozambican people to put an end to the cycle of war and violence and paved the way for launching collective efforts towards ensuring the restoration of durable peace in the country. The decision by the Government of Mozambique to bury the hatred deeply sown in people's hearts and to heal the wounds of war by initiating an era of continuous dialogue in an environment of tolerance, unity in diversity, respect for individual freedom and the rule of law resulted in lasting peace and sustainable development that ensured the development of policies for the welfare of the child.

My Government is proud to have hosted the African Conference on the use of children as soldiers, held last April in Maputo. In that meeting, over 250 representatives of government, civil society and international organizations were present and adopted the Maputo Declaration, which, *inter alia*, strongly condemned the use of child soldiers under 18 years of age and called upon all African States to promote an environment that favours the safe and healthy development of children and to take all necessary measures to ensure that no child under 18 years of age takes part in armed conflicts. At the Maputo Conference, international society clearly voiced its outcry over the continued use of child soldiers in armed conflict and urged the international community to seriously consider outlawing such use of child soldiers under 18 years of age.

In the presidential statement issued following the 29 June 1998 Security Council debate regarding children and armed conflict, the Council pledged to support efforts aimed at obtaining commitments to put to an end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts in violation of international law and to give special consideration to the disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and to the reintegration into society of children maimed or otherwise traumatized as a result of armed conflict.

The time has come to foster our political will to establish national and international legislation aimed at stopping and preventing the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. In this connection, I would like to offer our humble suggestion that all nations of the world launch a national reflection on the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. These debates should include representatives of governmental institutions, civil society and non-governmental organizations with the objective of shaping a national consensus and legislation on the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts.

The international community as a whole should play a pivotal role in promoting the ideals of child welfare and outlawing the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. We believe that the United Nations can be the most appropriate forum for the international discussion on the issue of children in armed conflict. Thus, we commend the excellent work undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In commending its work, we also appeal to the United Nations to continue its leading role in international efforts to stop and prevent the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts.

Finally, allow me to emphasize that the current national and international efforts aimed at stopping and preventing the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts can be successful only with international assistance and cooperation. Therefore, we would like to appeal to the international community to spare no effort in providing all kinds of assistance to those countries in need.

The President: I thank the representative of Mozambique for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of New Zealand. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): Mr. President, may I say at the outset that it is a particular honour to be able to address the Security Council at a meeting over which you, personally, are presiding. May I also congratulate you on your initiative in calling this debate. This is another valuable opportunity for the wider membership of the United Nations to contribute constructively to the important work of the Security Council. It will also serve to keep the issue of children in armed conflict at the forefront of all delegations' minds.

May I begin by making reference to the fine work being done by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Olara Otunnu. Mr. Otunnu is very effectively raising awareness of the issues concerning children in armed conflict and securing commitments for children's better protection. We applaud his contribution.

The United Nations has a central role in the protection of children. This role is expressed in a broad range of treaties, including Protocol I and Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions and of course the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Shielding children from the effects of armed conflict, both as victims and as participants, is an inseparable part of the United Nations responsibility to the world's children. The United Nations must also be active in ensuring that international standards of protection are adhered to. In this respect, New Zealand welcomes the fact that the use of children in armed conflict is a war crime over which the International Criminal Court will have jurisdiction.

The statement of the President of the Security Council in June 1998 regarding the question of children and armed conflict rightly condemned the targeting, recruitment and deployment of children in violation of international law. The President called upon all parties concerned to put an end to such activities.

Today we welcome recognition by the Council through the draft resolution currently before it that attention to the special needs of children affected by conflict is an essential aspect of efforts to build lasting peace. The Council should have regard to children's needs whenever it considers measures to assist communities and nations in the transition from conflict to peace.

It is for the Member States of the United Nations to set the standards which will shelter children from the anguish and suffering of wars, large and small. Current negotiations on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning children in armed conflict are particularly important in raising the legal standards of protection for children in this regard.

We must redouble our efforts to bridge differences and reach consensus on the optional protocol. Otherwise, we risk losing an important opportunity to improve the legal protection for children. Once concluded, the optional protocol would be a powerful tool for all those, including Mr. Otunnu, who are working to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict. It would send a clear message to those involved in recruiting child soldiers, and those targeting children in times of conflict, that their actions are unacceptable to the international community.

Finally, I wish to commend particularly the important work of UNICEF in assisting the child victims of armed conflict. My delegation encourages the closest possible cooperation between UNICEF and the Special Representative in working towards their mutual goals.

For example, Security Council resolution 1260 (1999), adopted just last Friday, calls for the Special Representative and UNICEF, along with the Government of Sierra Leone, to give particular attention to the long-term rehabilitation of child combatants in Sierra Leone, as well as their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. New Zealand has contributed on several occasions to UNICEF's focused and practical work in Sierra Leone and elsewhere. Clearly there are opportunities for us all as Member States, as well as our international agencies, to work together and share experience in all such situations, to bring about the best outcomes for those children affected by armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of New Zealand for his statement.

The next speaker is the representative of Guyana. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and make his statement.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): There can be no more monstrous crime against humanity than the use and abuse of children in times of armed conflict. Most animals, even the lowest forms, instinctively protect their young from harm. Yet man, despite his supposedly superior level of intelligence and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, has been known to subject his progeny to unimaginable horrors. Children die daily as a result of being dragooned into war. Every day and everywhere, we see televised images of the young maimed and made old by constant exposure to abduction, forced labour and violence.

Concerned as we are with this terrible scourge, the Government of Guyana joins the resounding call that has been made today for an end to what has been properly termed the modern-day version of child sacrifice. We are grateful to you, Sir, and your delegation and all the members of the Council for sponsoring this timely debate aimed at promoting a greater awareness of this problem. We are especially heartened to see you personally presiding, and so selflessly, over our deliberations, even at this late hour.

I also wish to pay tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olaru Otunnu, for successfully raising the profile of this issue in the world's attention, and more particularly for his compelling presentation earlier today. At the same time we express our profound admiration to the wide array of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the many non-governmental organizations which, despite many constraints, labour in service to the children of the world. We urge their continuing coordination and cooperation so as to maximize the impact of their collective efforts.

As we have been made painfully aware, the new genre of intra-State conflicts has altered both the nature and the scope of war. Today, the battle lines encompass the civilian population, including defenceless women and children. The reports produced by the Special Representative, Mr. Otunnu, and by Mrs. Graça Machel provide graphic testimony of the impact of armed conflict on children. These documents attest to the disastrous consequences of conflicts and, more importantly, to the need for urgent measures to be taken by the international community to deter the further involvement of children. Among such measures could be firm action to bring those who are responsible for such crimes to justice so that they might feel the full weight of international opprobrium and condemnation. Rape and other forms of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict should be deemed — as the Special Representative suggests — as criminal acts subject to harsh punishment.

Similarly, we should seek within the international legal system to prohibit the use of children as military pawns in conflicts. More strenuous efforts are needed to enhance respect for accepted standards of behaviour and to devise more effective means to insulate children from the impact of war. Guyana reiterates its call for a concrete ban on anti-personnel mines and for continuing efforts to expand mine clearance. As for the many victims who have been made to suffer this type of brutality, the international community must afford them every chance for physical and psychological comfort and rehabilitation.

As we also realize, we cannot fully address the impact of armed conflicts on children without an examination of the sources of these conflicts. Repeated studies have shown that persistent economic, social and political crises contribute to the breakdown of law and order in all societies. The attendant economic marginalization of many developing countries in the world economy, as well as the social impact of structural adjustment programmes, have been clearly cited by Mrs. Machel and others as conditions which create instability and conflict. Whether in Africa, Asia, the Americas or Europe, conflict eventually erodes the

infrastructure of all countries involved, making it difficult if not impossible for them to have productive economies.

In this context, my delegation, like others, would like to draw attention to the negative effects that economic sanctions can have on the more vulnerable groups of society. In many cases, if not most, sanctions can lead to deprivation of adequate food supplies and basic social services, resulting in great hardship, especially for children.

The hopes of every nation for future development depend on its youth. Instead of being used as cannon fodder, a nation's youth should be nurtured and trained to become agents of construction, rather than of destruction. They should be schooled in the art and science of nation-building instead of learning to become killing machines. For once so used, it is difficult for them to return to normality. As refugees or internally displaced persons, they are denied the customary opportunities of education, training and family stability which they need if they are to become useful citizens.

In the face of this distressing situation, it is imperative that we seek to strengthen the international legal instruments that have been forged to protect the rights of civilians in conflict, particularly the young and the innocent. The Fourth Geneva Convention and its additional protocols, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, clearly set out principles and standards for the protection and empowerment of children. Today, those conventions continue to be routinely flouted by savage and unscrupulous warmongers. Such barbarism cannot be tolerated by our civilization, since in the end, as one of our country's poets has said, "We are all involved, we are all consumed." We must therefore strive to give these legal instruments more teeth, going beyond ratification to full implementation.

As the primary guarantor of international peace and security, the Security Council has a clear and present obligation to deal condignly with the inhumane use of children in armed conflict. It is thus my delegation's fervent hope that out of this debate will come a strong resolution that will reflect the international community's determination to protect those who are unable to protect themselves and who instead must rely on us to champion their cause.

The President: I thank the representative of Guyana for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Philippines. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): I wish to join others who have earlier expressed their gratitude to you, Sir, for convening this meeting. It is opportune at this time for all of us here, as we are about to enter the next millennium, to renew our commitment to the continued welfare and protection of all children in the world.

Children's welfare has always figured prominently in many of the world's conventions and legal instruments. The Geneva Conventions and their protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, more recently, the convention regarding the elimination of the worst forms of child labour are concerted efforts by all of us to further provide the children of the Earth the necessary protection and requirements to develop themselves and grow into productive and happy individuals. It is because we know that the children of today will be our leaders tomorrow that we all try to give them the best of what we have and what we know, and of our know-how.

As we approach the year 2000, it is only timely to find out how mankind's children have fared and how we ourselves have fared in fulfilling our responsibilities in the promotion of their welfare.

What we see is not encouraging. The United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report* tells us that there are more than 1 billion women and children living in abject poverty. According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict — and I pay tribute to him — 2 million children have died in situations of armed conflict since 1987, and three times that number have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. The latest research indicates that more than 300,000 children under 18 years of age are fighting in 36 armed conflicts around the world. Many of these children were unlawfully recruited, others kidnapped or coerced into service. Nearly 90 per cent of the casualties of wars in this century have been civilians, mostly women and children. At least half of all refugees and displaced persons are children.

I could probably go on and give figures on how many children have been left orphans by conflicts, or become refugees or displaced persons within their countries. I could also go on giving figures regarding numbers of children physically maimed and

psychologically and emotionally scarred for life by war. Figures will not be hard to find and examples will be readily available; many previous speakers have already cited them.

The subject of children and armed conflict is familiar to us all, a subject we have tried so many times to address and that we continue to address, individually and collectively.

We in the Philippines, which was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have established legislative and administrative foundations to uphold children's rights and their well-being. A child-rights centre, under the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, continues to effectively operate, investigating and initiating legal action on behalf of child victims of human rights violations. Philippine interest and active participation in the working groups on the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict are indicative of the Philippine commitment to the fulfilment of the rights of the child, particularly the right to life. The child's health, nutrition, education and welfare remain priority concerns of the Philippine Government.

We know that armed conflicts and wars violate every right of a child — the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to the development of the personality and the right to be nurtured and protected. We also know that children are among the first victims in armed conflicts. They are tortured, raped and often killed. Those who survive suffer immeasurable damage to their moral and psychological development.

As long as there remain conflicts and wars in the world, all of us should persist in our determination to provide children adequate protection. There should be no let-up in disseminating information on the atrocities experienced by these children. We should continue to persevere in finding ways and measures to protect the child's inviolability. I wish to reiterate Philippine support for the idea of the child as a zone of peace, as proposed by the expert of the Secretary-General who undertook a study on the impact of armed conflict on children. The Philippines also supports the expert's many recommendations on concerted action by the international community and civil society to ameliorate the sufferings of child victims of armed conflict.

The Secretary-General's report on the progress in the implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children — which established goals for reducing the child-mortality rate, maternal mortality, malnutrition, and for increasing provisions of water and sanitation, of basic education and of special protection for children by the year 2000 — has stated that the cost of meeting these goals is estimated to represent less than one per cent of global output. In its entirety, the cost represents a very small investment to build a better, brighter future for our children, for ourselves and for all the world.

The President: I thank the representative of Philippines for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Rwanda. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Mutaboba (Rwanda): Let me add my delegation's voice to those who spoke earlier to congratulate you, Sir, as you lead this Council's deliberations today and tonight, and let me tell you that we are as happy to see you in the chair tonight as we have been on several past occasions when we, as you know, have met in other gatherings of common interest. I would also like to pay tribute to Ambassador Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for his endeavours and determination to promote better protection of children and their welfare. He has, and you have, our full support, and we wish you well.

I also wish to state my delegation's hope of seeing this Council open its doors more frequently in the future to debates of this kind. Indeed, peace and security as well as wise resolutions are best reached when, as today, they are talked of in the open, with great transparency, thus engaging in the debate those who care and leaving the vote to those who represent us all.

As everybody knows, Rwanda lived through unforgettable times of war from 1959 into the early 1990s: wars caused by bad leadership and politics of exclusion practised by successive regimes. The genocide that followed was a result of that bad leadership coupled with a lack of consistency in the decisions taken by many who had and have the power to prevent and/or stop it.

The first victims of that bad leadership and politics of exclusion were innocent children who were not allowed access to education because of who they were and where they were born. It was the same children who

had grown in an atmosphere of rampant injustice who were naturally mobilized and ready to be recruited as first-hand witnesses of that bad leadership and of those unjust policies that prevented people from enjoying their basic rights. Children who witness such a situation for long are potentially the ones to fight against injustices directed at them, but only when and if they are given the chance and the means to do so.

These means differ from one country and one situation to another. We pay tribute to those who lose their lives defending their rights. Unfortunately, it is in the name of defending those rights that most such children have lost more of their rights, the main one being the right to be a child. To be recruited for a cause is one thing, and to fight a war is another. In armed conflicts, the most vulnerable people are civilians: elderly people, women and children. In Rwanda the magnitude of the suffering that children went through is simply difficult to describe. But the trauma they still manifest can indicate how much they suffer inside even when their rights have been recovered. It is the duty of the Council to ensure that this does not happen again — not just in Rwanda but anywhere else on the globe.

The world around children should care more, because it is the same world of adults and leaders that drew them into these situations in the first place. We cannot tolerate seeing children being treated like objects of sexual perversion by deviant parents and relatives, by wealthy business people or peacekeepers who have money even to buy the virginity of small young girls at the price of a life trauma few of them can even talk about. Among the children we need to protect, many have suffered the injustices we referred to earlier. Many have suffered the harsh environment of war and the need to kill: to kill to save themselves and their future, or to kill because they have been told to do so.

The resolution sought from the Council today can prevent more of these killings in the future. Many of these children have survived mine blasts and bear scars, with amputated legs and arms; they continue to live with such a traumatizing experience long after the war is gone. It is the Council's duty to promise them a better future and guaranties that their own children will not be subjected to the same atrocities and mistreatment from adults.

We have several thousand child heads of families and households in Rwanda, where only children are grouped in a house and called a family — but a family without a father, without a mother, without any living grown-up relative to look after them. The oldest, no matter how young she or he is, has become the head of the family *ipso facto*. Ambassador Olara Otunnu saw that on his trip to Rwanda and is thus a witness. Looking at those kids desperately pampering each other on the ground on the one hand and listening to intellectual debates like this one on the other shows how distant reality is from decision-makers and vice versa. Resolutions should bridge the gap and bring us to the people we ignore and yet wish to assist.

Kids are coerced in various parts of the world and given weapons to kill other children and adults. They are promised a better life, mind you. But what kind of better life is this for such young memories after they have killed so many people? Those who liberate the land and the people feel proud of their job, but those who mass-kill their peers and adults will remain traumatized by what they did and saw.

In any case, however, both groups of children need help. We call this fair justice. In Rwanda, those who fought have been demobilized and taken to schools where they can learn and acquire skills. Those who killed were taken to prisons but were later released to be rehabilitated and integrated into their society. We wish to thank the United Nations agencies for their assistance to our Government in this exercise, especially the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund, as well as many non-governmental organizations. We thank them all, and we hope that the wonderful efforts being made by many, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, will not be wasted so that we can reach a total ban on abusing children's rights.

My delegation strongly hopes that the Security Council can stand firm and do its duty to protect the peace and security of children, because we believe that to inculcate kids with the culture of peace is a guarantee that we can offer a better future to generations to come.

To conclude, let me appeal to the Council to think of the most vulnerable group of kids in armed conflicts today: orphans. Not only do they experience the trauma of witnessing the death of their parents and relatives, but they also survive worse events. Some have been lucky enough to find foster families; others have not. The message is the same: as much as we need a world order,

we should be aware of one important thing: that there will be no world after us if children are not taken care of. This is a task for all of us: to protect the rights of children.

Humanitarianism has failed in most cases; the law of the land has been broken; international humanitarian law and United Nations conventions have been broken by those meant to protect them and apply them. Children have been victims of such malfeasance, and the world body should take measures now to ensure that we put children first to ensure a better future for all.

The President: I thank the representative of Rwanda for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of Belarus. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): I wish first of all to join other delegations, Mr. President, in thanking you and the other members of the Security Council for your initiative to debate the question of children and armed conflict. The Belarus delegation believes, Mr. Minister, that your presiding over this meeting will promote the formulation of new approaches to resolving this complex problem.

We also wish to note the important role of and efforts undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Otunnu. We believe that his initiatives and recommendations deserve the most assiduous attention and implementation in the practical activities of the United Nations.

Just over a year ago, when the Security Council was considering a similar question, the overwhelming majority of participants in the discussion took note of the alarming situation. In the statements made by representatives of member States, pessimism sometimes prevailed over optimism. In that connection, our delegation takes particular note of the fact that the Security Council is now devoting ever closer attention to the problem of the tragic link between childhood and armed conflict. We are convinced that, in the final analysis, the entire international community will become fully aware of the highest priority to be accorded to the eradication of conflicts, above all as the cause of the deaths and ruined lives of children, who have the most direct impact on the future progress of humanity.

Unfortunately, despite the significant efforts of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international institutions and organizations, we cannot detect today any substantive improvement in the situation of children in regions of conflict throughout the planet. Indeed, children remain the principal and most vulnerable victims of armed conflict in various regions of the world. Statistics continue to attest to growing child mortality as a result of direct hostilities or the ruinous consequences of such actions.

Clearly, the Security Council has minutely analysed the reasons for and consequences of the participation of children in armed conflict in the twilight of this century. Today, there is a need for practical action to implement the conclusions and recommendations that have been drafted. In other words, there must be a new strategy that, to the greatest possible extent, will mitigate the impact of conflict on children; exclude minors from the ranks of armed combatants; ensure the priority access of children to humanitarian assistance; and provide for the design of effective mechanisms to prevent violence towards child victims of armed conflict.

Among the most important elements of such a strategy must be the further improvement of the legal basis for the protection of the rights, needs and interests of the young victims of hostilities. We are convinced that this year, as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, pillars of humanitarian law, and the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this question is of growing and particular relevance. Belarus, which has ratified all of these Conventions, is prepared to contribute to the process of establishing a more effective mechanism for their implementation, binding — and this is especially critical — on all subjects of international law. The most important step in this direction is further work to strengthen the status of the International Criminal Court, which will be endowed with the relevant competences to consider all types of crime against children.

Particular attention should be devoted to sanctions, which continue significantly to affect the representatives of the most vulnerable sector of the civilian population: children. A recent and most convincing confirmation of this fact is the UNICEF report on the situation of children in Iraq and Angola. In this respect, as we see it, the Security Council must make special exemptions of a humanitarian nature to minimize, in a targeted way, the impact of measures of economic coercion.

We find continued relevance in the idea of including in the reports of the Secretary-General and the resolutions of the Security Council special sections proposing preventive measures regarding the rights of minors, starting with measures to disarm armed youth and to prevent their participation in hostilities, and ending with humanitarian activities in the post-conflict period.

It is perfectly obvious that the problem of the tragic involvement of children in conflict will remain topical, to a greater or lesser extent, until mankind is able to muster the strength and political will to seek peaceful solutions to disputes. The Republic of Belarus does not feel that a world without war or conflict is a utopian ideal. We see in it the most important objective and an imperative need for the international community and the United Nations in the new century.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Colombia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to thank you, Sir, and the members of the Security Council for giving the opportunity to non-member States of the Council to participate in this meeting.

I wish to begin my brief statement with a special recognition of the bodies of the United Nations system that contribute to the protection of minors in armed conflict. The entire international community, each of its member States and, in particular, boys, girls and adolescents affected by armed conflict have benefited from the activities of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, other specialized agencies of the United Nations and various regional multilateral organizations. Colombia stresses the professional manner in which each of these has worked to promote the welfare of minors in the many armed conflicts that, unfortunately, persist throughout the world. This should, however, provide the opportunity to call for a sufficiently clear definition of the competences of these bodies in addressing such a complex situation as that before us today.

This meeting of the Security Council, like that held in June 1998, is a further demonstration of the importance which the international community attaches to this humanitarian topic. As then, it is now acknowledged that the issue of children and armed conflict is an area in which each and every member of the Security Council has serious concerns. It is high time. These efforts complement those of various United Nations agencies that are equally interested in delving deeper into this item on the international agenda.

We were most gratified, for instance, to note the reference made to children and armed conflict in the conclusions agreed at the humanitarian segment of the session of the Economic and Social Council held in Geneva last July. There, in a very specific and emphatic way, the Council emphasized, *inter alia*, the importance of recognizing the particular vulnerabilities of children and adolescents in armed conflict and of including specific provisions for minors in peace agreements and negotiations between parties to a conflict.

It is precisely this reference by the Economic and Social Council that leads us to ask a question that we have raised in various international forums open to all States. The Government of Colombia is convinced that the most effective way of protecting civilians, particularly children, in an armed conflict is to end the conflict through a negotiated political solution.

A negotiated political solution is the ideal instrument to shield children from the dangers of war. It would help to prevent internal displacements — particularly important given the high proportion of displaced minors — mitigate the effects of the illegal traffic of weapons on children, put an end to the practice engaged in by rebel and other illegal armed groups of recruiting minors to participate in hostilities, and, finally, help children regain the dignity to which they are entitled in all societies.

I shall conclude my statement by inviting members of the Council, the other States that have participated in today's debate as well as those that, for one reason or another, were unable to do so, and States members of the Group of Friends of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara Otunnu, to continue this debate in the General Assembly — the forum best suited to an exchange of views on topics such as the one we are discussing today. The General Assembly is a most appropriate place to debate, discuss, indulge in polemics on, reflect, consider and examine in depth the situation of children and armed conflict.

The time is ripe to forge a genuine global consensus that will consolidate a just system for the protection of minors affected by armed conflict. It is for that reason that we reiterate our readiness to work towards the

common dream of a childhood free from the heavy burdens that adults have unfairly placed on the shoulders of our greatest hope.

The President: Members have before them document S/1999/911, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

It is my understanding that the Security Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution (S/1999/911) before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Gabon, Gambia, Malaysia, Namibia, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1261 (1999).

The representative of the United States has asked for the floor, and I now call on him.

Mr. Minton (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor again. I shall be brief.

The misleading substance of the Iraqi Permanent Representative's statement earlier tonight compelled my delegation to seek a right of reply this evening. I will get straight to the point.

The current leadership in Iraq is the only party responsible for the inadequacies of the conditions inside the territory it controls. The Iraqi leadership has created and is sustaining the circumstances in which the people of Iraq unfortunately find themselves. It is the unwillingness of the leadership of Iraq to meet accepted obligations as defined by this Council or to implement the mandated humanitarian programme effectively that perpetuates the unfortunate situation within the country.

Iraq would have members believe that it is committed to the welfare of its population, particularly its children, the subject of our discussions today. All available evidence will lead members to the opposite conclusion. The current Iraqi leadership, by its actions, shows that it has nothing but the utmost contempt for its own people. Colleagues will recall that the Secretary-General has recommended for over one year that the Government of Iraq purchase targeted nutritional supplements for children — I repeat, for children — and mothers. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) again joined that appeal with the release of its survey on child and maternal mortality in Iraq.

Clearly, the Government of Iraq does not concur with the assessment by the Secretary-General or UNICEF. It has ordered only about 11 per cent of the total allocation of 15 million of these critical supplements for children and mothers. Worse than that, it has actually reduced, not increased, the value of the high-protein biscuits and therapeutic milk that it was supposed to order for vulnerable populations.

As the Secretary-General noted in previous reports, the Government of Iraq continues to under-order, or not order at all, key food basket items such as pulses and dairy products. The Secretary-General concluded that the lack of these items, some of which have not been ordered at all by the Government of Iraq, has reduced the caloric value of the food basket available to the Iraqi people.

Council members are aware that $241 million in medicines and medical equipment is bottled up in warehouses, unavailable for use by children, mothers or any of the general population. That means that almost 40 per cent of all medicines and medical supplies that have arrived in Iraq through six phases of the oil-for-food programme are gathering dust in Iraqi Government warehouses.

If that were not enough evidence of a Government not working for its people, we all recently became aware of the results of the UNICEF surveys on child and maternal mortality. What these surveys clearly showed was that where the Government of Iraq is responsible for the population, mortality markedly increased since 1991. At the same time, in the north, where the United Nations is implementing the programme, mortality figures actually declined to levels that were better than they were before the Gulf war — in other words, there has been a marked improvement where the Iraqi Government is not in charge.

Despite being presented with this evidence, the Government of Iraq refuses to order nutritional supplements specifically for mothers and children, refuses to order all the foodstuffs necessary to complete the food basket, refuses to release critical medicines from overstuffed warehouses and refuses to significantly increase spending on needed pharmaceutical items.

The United States and other members of the Council support UNICEF's recommendations to improve the quality of life for Iraqi women and children. The Government of Iraq clearly does not. On the contrary, it seems determined to promote policies to deny the Iraqi people the full benefits of the Council's mandated humanitarian programmes, perhaps so as to be able thereby to continue making the specious argument that sanctions are to be blame for the suffering that the regime itself perpetuates.

We agree with the Secretary-General's conclusion that despite the Iraqi leadership's best efforts to subvert the Council's humanitarian effort, the oil-for-food programme continues to provide essential support in the current situation. The programme has delivered more than $7 billion in food, medicine, medical supplies and a wide range of humanitarian goods.

The Security Council and the United Nations are doing their part to help all of the people of Iraq. It is time for the Iraqi leadership to respond in kind and finally start putting the welfare of its people ahead of its own narrow interests. Unfortunately, and unfortunately, we will hear more bombast on this subject, perhaps even tonight. But the truth of this sad situation is for all to see in the Secretary-General's most recent report to the Council and its strong appeal to Iraq to implement fully the existing humanitarian programmes that the Council has already mandated.

The President: The representative of Iraq has asked for the floor. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: Allow me also to apologize for taking the floor a second time.

I do not know why the representative of the United States has insisted on availing himself of his right of reply, because each us has spoken and expressed our points of view. This is not a democratic way to work at the United Nations. The statement of the representative of the United States is completely trivial and undeserving of a reply.

The report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council reaffirmed that Iraq is cooperating with the Iraq programme. Regardless of whatever paragraph laying the blame at Iraq's doorstep the United States attempts to insert here or there, the problem is that the programme cannot work or put an end to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Iraq. I do understand that the world's super-Power need not lie. However, it seems that the power of the United States is a sham hiding behind unlimited intellectual and moral weakness.

The report of the United Nations Children's Fund — whose Executive Director is the American Ms. Bellamy — states that the sanctions have led to the deaths of half a million Iraqi children under the age of five.

Ambassador Amorim's report to the Security Council states that the sanctions have destroyed the social fabric of Iraq.

The facts set forth by the United Nations regarding the situation in Iraq before the sanctions were imposed show that Iraq had attained the highest level of socio-economic development in the region, under the very same Government it has today, which does care for its people. So why do the Americans insist on denying these facts? Why does the United States insist that the emperor is wearing the fanciest of clothes? Iraq today says that the emperor is naked. The emperor is a liar, an arms merchant and a bloodsucker of the people. Many voices will be raised in the future to say the very same thing.

As for the talk about the relations between the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people, I do not believe the Americans are to be the judges of that. Let facts speak for themselves. The Iraqis are rallied around their Government and their leader, President Saddam Hussein, despite the siege imposed by the United States and despite hunger. Let me tell you this: hunger does not cause great peoples to kneel.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.25 p.m.